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The world of animated films and comic art

Funnyworld

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Frazetta in Animation
Walt Disney in Kansas City
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Zander's Animation Parlour

On the Covers

The front and back covers of this issue are devoted to three frames from, of all things, a television commercial—a quite special commercial, animated by Richard Williams. For the full story, turn to page 7.

Editorial

By MIKE BARRIER

As too many of *Funnyworld's* readers are aware, No. 18 appeared behind schedule, just like in the bad old days. We think that we have finally got our production problems solved, and that the quarterly schedule will be maintained from now on. But I will not brag about our new frequency of publication until the magazine has appeared on time for a few issues.

A Barks Book. For many years, I have been compiling a bibliography of Carl Barks' comic-book work, and gathering other information about him, all with an eye toward eventual book publication. That book will finally be published within the next few months, as a deluxe, large-format paperback of several hundred pages. The manuscript —approximately 500 pages of it — has been delivered to the typesetters, and publication is tentatively set for March 27, 1979, Carl Barks' 78th birthday. The book's title: *Carl Barks and the Art of the Comic Book*.

The book is broken down into three sections. The first is a biographical/critical essay on Barks and his work; this is essentially a vastly expanded and heavily revised version of my earlier essay, "The Lord of Quackly Hall," which was published in *Comic Art* in 1968. It draws extensively on my four interviews with Carl, and my 12 years of correspondence with him, and is far more detailed and complete than anything previously written about Barks.

The second section is the bibliography, which lists everything Barks has ever done for Western Publishing Co., including all of his unpublished work. The bibliography is fully annotated, in many cases with comments from Barks himself, and includes all American reprints through 1978.

The third section consists of several appendices: a chronological listing of Barks' stories, based on the dates when he submitted them to Western; an account of Barks' involvement in the story for an Uncle Scrooge animated cartoon that was never made; a list of the Disney cartoons on which Barks worked as a story man when he was employed at the studio from 1935 to 1942; and a selective bibliography of articles about Barks and his work.

The book will be extensively illustrated with rare photos and drawings, and excerpts from Barks' published work. Walt Disney Productions, which is now planning a deluxe volume of reprints in tribute to Barks (this will be in addition to the Donald Duck and Uncle Scrooge volumes from Abbeville Press), has been most generous in permitting me to reproduce its copyrighted material.

A chapter from the book, dealing with Barks' work as a Disney story man, will be published in *Funnyworld* No. 20. That issue will also contain full information on ordering the book.

It is a thrill for me, after so many years of work on this book, to be so close to its publication. Happily, I have no doubts that the effort was worthwhile.

Disney Exhibit. Those readers who will be in the Washington, D.C., area between Thanksgiving and the end of January 1979 will find an exhibit at the Library of Congress that should be of interest to them, for reasons that will be apparent from the title: "Building a Better Mouse: Fifty Years of Animation." The title really should be, "Fifty Years of *Disney* Animation," because the exhibit is in fact a tribute to the Disney studio's work between the premiere of *Steamboat Willie* in 1928 and the start of World War II.

Mickey Mouse's 50th birthday provided the pretext for the exhibit, but Mickey is only part of it, and a relatively small part at that. The exhibit is divided into eight major sections, one apiece for Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, the Silly Symphonies, and the first five animated features: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, Pinocchio, Fantasia, Dumbo,* and *Bambi.* Film clips will be shown on video monitors in each section; the Mickey Mouse section has excerpts from *Steamboat Willie, The Band Concert,* and "The Sorcerer's Apprentice" from *Fantasia*, for example, and the excerpt for Donald Duck is the complete title song from *The Three Caballeros*. The Walt Disney Archives loaned more than 50 items for the exhibit—story sketches, cels, animation and layout drawings, a model of Monstro the Whale—and the exhibit also includes more than 80 items from the Library's own collections—books, comic books, model sheets, original comic-strip art, posters, sheet

Letters	3
Richard Williams	7
Eric Knight	13
Laugh-o-Grams	22
Dick Huemer	35
Filmex	37
Reviews	45

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music, and even a couple of maps.

I served as "curatorial consultant" for the exhibit, which means that I chose the items to be exhibited and the film clips: I also determined the basic organization of the exhibit, and wrote the captions.

I wrote an essay on Disney animation for the exhibit catalog, which will be sold only at the Library. That essay will be reprinted in *Funnyworld* No. 20, probably in company with some photographs from what promises to be, as of this writing a gala opening for the exhibit on the evening of November 20.

Publications. So far as I know, there is only one magazine, in addition to *Funnyworld*, that is devoted to animated cartoons. It is a digest-sized quarterly called *Mindrot*—an unpretentious, fan-oriented publication that is filled with chatty columns and letters and such things as readers' lists of their 10 favorite cartoons. There is also more substantial material, such as an interview with Jack Hannah, the former Disney director, and a list of the MGM cartoons. (All of this is in No. 11, published last summer.) Single copies are $1.50 and subscriptions are $5.00 for four issues, from David Mruz, 3112 Holmes Ave. South, Minneapolis, Minn. 55408.

Frames: A Selection of Drawings and Statements by Independent American Animators is one of those rare books that is best described in the words of the press release that accompanied it:

"*Frames* is an anthology of work by 70 independent American film animators . . . It is unique as a collaborative effort: over 100 filmmakers were invited to design their own page and submit it in 'camera-ready' form . . .

"The drawings in *Frames* reflect the influence of . . . new technology. Some interesting and unexpected themes emerge: an increased seriousness and self-consciousness; an absorption with facial studies and self-portraiture sometimes couched in a fictive context; an increased use of photography in what is traditionally the realm of drafting."

The book is, in short, a companion piece to the authors' films, and one's response to *Frames* can probably be predicted from one's response to the films. I found the book to be, like the films, a very mixed bag; it is the juxtaposition of personalities in the book—the serious artist and the shameless self-promoter, on adjoining pages—that makes it so interesting.

Courtesy of Pat Leahy

The animator at the far right in this photo of a very early animation studio is Frank Moser; the other people in the photo, and the studio itself, have not been identified. Can anyone identify them?

Frames was assembled by George Griffin, himself an independent animator and a contributor to the book. Copies can be ordered from Griffin for $5 each; the address is 28 E. Fourth St., New York, N.Y. 10003.

Oxford Book. Work on my history of American animation for Oxford University Press has proceeded at a steady pace in the last few months; Milt Gray and I have recorded interviews with a number of people, including Don Christensen, Dick Hall, Bill Peet, David Raksin, and Clair Weeks.

My deadline for the book has been extended because of my work on *That's Not All Folks*, an art book about the Warner Bros. cartoons (see page 5 for details), and it now appears that the Oxford Book will be completed in the summer of 1979 and published in 1980.

I was pleased that Oxford agreed to extending my deadline. Even though I am eager to finish the Oxford book, a deluxe book on the Warner cartoons has been one of my pet projects for a long time (I first submitted an outline for such a book to Warner Bros. in 1974, shortly after *The Art of Walt Disney* appeared). The two books will complement one another, since the Warner book will be predominantly a picture book, and generally lighter in tone than the Oxford book, even though both books will be serious and accurate.

Back Issues. After many delays, University Microfilms International has at last photographed all the back issues of *Funnyworld*, and they are available in microfilm, microfiche, and Xerox copies. Inquiries should be directed to University Microfilms International, 300 N. Zeeb Rd., Ann Arbor, Mich. 48106.

Letters to Mike Barrier

I am hopeful that the mechanics of Funnyworld*'s publication will soon be so streamlined that it will be possible to run letters of comment on the immediately preceding issue. For the time being, though, there will be a two-*

©1942 Walt Disney Productions

From The New Spirit.

issue lag. This issue's letters are on articles that appeared in No. 17.

Wilfred Jackson worked for Walt Disney for more than 30 years, directing many classic shorts in the '30s and sequences in most of the Disney feature cartoons. Richard Shale's article on the Disney studio during World War II, in Funnyworld *No. 17, prompted Jackson to remember the unusual circumstances surrounding the production of* The New Spirit, *a Donald Duck cartoon that was rushed into the theaters early in 1942 to encourage payment of income taxes.*

From WILFRED JACKSON: Directing *The New Spirit* was a unique experience, in that, for once, meeting our deadline took precedence over *all* other considerations—even including making sure we got exactly what Walt wanted into the picture—or, making sure Walt knew how *his* picture was going to look in time for him to do anything about it if he did not like something in it. This was, perhaps, the only time I was in complete control of a large part of one of the cartoons I directed for Walt. (The ending, with scenes of battleships, etc., was Ben Sharpsteen's. Only the part with Donald Duck was mine.) But this wasn't quite as good as it may sound, because there was not enough time allowed to do a good job of it.

We were given an absolutely ridiculous, completely *impossible* deadline for a cartoon with full animation of the Duck in a good-sized part of it, considering the way production procedures were set up in the Disney organization, and the way we had all been trained to make Walt's cartoons for him. As I recall it, we had something like *one month* from our first story meeting to the delivery date with a Technicolor answer print.

Our little crew working on the picture pitched in that first day and each of us kept on working until he was too tired to work any more. Then he went home to sleep, whatever time of whatever day it was, and whenever he woke up he came back to work again, whatever time of the day, or night, of whatever day that might be. This caused some interesting problems for a director, who was also working that way, in coordinating the efforts of the various artists and technicians who actually made the cartoon.

We had to invent a completely new approach, for us at Disney's—a production routine that would save every minute possible in each step on the way to the final answer print. As soon as a small part of the continuity was pinned up on the story board, and approved in a mini-story meeting, it was broken down into the final production continuity of scene cuts and put into animation, often using the story sketch as a temporary layout. Dialogue was recorded piecemeal as small portions of the story were visualized, instead of for the entire short subject, as we usually did. Layouts and background sketches were often made while the animator was working on a scene, even occasionally after the animation was done, instead of before the animator picked up his scene, as we *always* did it. Meanwhile, the story men were getting the next little section up on the boards. Everyone was doing everything all at the same time, instead of in proper sequence. It's a wonder it worked at all.

Animation was not roughed out and tested. The animators drew cleaned-up extremes which were also in-betweened with cleaned-up drawings. A clean-up pencil test was shot, then the scene moved on through ink and paint while the film of the test was being developed and sent back to the animator so he could see what he had done. *Usually*, the animator would get his test to me for me to view it on my movieola before the inked and painted cels were finished and in camera being shot for production. I did not have a running reel to see the test in continuity with other scenes, but viewed each isolated scene by itself in sync with the appropriate part of our temporary sound track. After I saw each test it was cut into the running reel—we didn't take time to do that first because it might make the difference between catching a mistake that had to be corrected while the scene was still in ink and paint, and not catching it until the scene had been shot, requiring a retake instead of just changing a few cels. Only if something was radically wrong did I call for a correction. It was vital not to interrupt the flow of work through ink and paint and to camera unless absolutely necessary. These changes were not tested. I did not see the changed action until the "daily" came back from Technicolor. Then, if it was absoutely necessary to do so, *and* if time enough remained before our deadline, a retake was needed before another

change could be made. This was a quite different approach to making a cartoon from our customary painstaking process with high quality as the prime objective.

Of course Walt was in on our piece-by-piece story meetings to okay each bit for production before animation was begun on it. But, as I recall it, each little piece of the continuity got an "okay with changes," frequently with such extensive changes to be made as to amount almost to doing it all over in a different way. It was this altered version Walt did not see until it was too late for him to do anything about it. I asked him, from time to time, if he would like to see a few of the tests as they began to come in, but he chose not to see any of the animation until he could see it as part of the complete continuity of the picture. We simply did not have the time to spare to shoot story sketches to fill out the running reel, so this did not come about until the last two or three scenes were in camera being shot for production. When Walt finally got his first look at what we had done it was only a day or so before our deadline. This left no time for any retakes--only barely enough time to get a balanced print from Technicolor and a final re-recording of our soundtrack for the print.

I do not believe I have ever seen Walt so completely frustrated when viewing one of the cartoons I directed for him.

But, as ridiculous as our deadline was, we made it. I have the satisfaction of knowing that I had my part in doing the impossible for Walt that one time. The word impossible was not in Walt's vocabulary, and so he expected it of us all as a matter of course.

That's Not All, Folks is the title of a book that will be published in the fall of 1979; its subtitle will be "The Story of Looney Tunes and Merrie Melodies," and it will mark the 50th anniversary of Looney Tunes, in May 1980.

This book will be, in short, the Warner cartoon equivalent of *The Art of Walt Disney*; and I am writing it and assembling the illustrations for it. The book will have at least 300 illustrations, more than half of them in color, and will be comparable to *The Art of Walt Disney* in every respect except sheer physical bulk. I have already turned up more than a thousand potential illustrations for the book—story sketches, model sheets, photographs, animation drawings, background paintings, character and background layouts, cels, printed material—with the promise of many more to come.

My contract is with Warner Books, which will publish *That's Not All, Folks* as a trade paperback in 1980. The book will be published in hard covers in 1979 by an art-book publisher still to be selected.

Even though so many illustrations have already been made available to me, I am still looking for material of high quality. If you have anything that might be usable, let me hear from you as soon as possible—preferably by the end of the year, since all of the illustrations must be submitted to Warner Books on January 31, 1979. My address is 226 N. Saint Asaph St., Alexandria, Va. 22314.

Mike Barrier

The reviews in No. 17 were the target of the sharpest comments. John Canemaker writes on animation for Funnyworld *and other magazines. His article on George Griffin will be in* Funnyworld *No. 20.*

From JOHN CANEMAKER: I was amused by the brevity of your book review of *Experimental Animation.* I detect a barely concealed distaste for and/or lack of interest in the "new" animation and its creators.

Frank Mouris *is* indeed an animator. He is the creator and director of images that are manipulated frame-by-frame. The definition of "animator" is not confined to one who worked for decades in a cartoon factory interpreting other people's ideas, designs, stories, characters, direction.

The independent animators, in the past as well as today, are filmmakers who assume total responsibility for their films from conception to completion. Many are artists who explore alternative ways of communicating, of seeing and interpreting. They speak a filmic language that goes beyond the ancient discoveries of Melies, Porter, and Griffith. They expand the possibilities of the animation medium by allowing the viewer to participate in the creative process, an experience denied by the redundancy and artistic bankruptcy of most of today's industry-oriented product.

I trust *Funnyworld* will expand the consciousness of its readers in this vital and vast area of the animated film.

Milton Gray, Funnyworld*'s associate editor (and himself an animator), was moved to reply to Canemaker's letter.*

From MILTON GRAY: Not all animation filmmakers are animators any more than every person caught by a newsreel or home-movie camera is an actor. When something inanimate—like an object or a drawing—moves as though it has a life of its own, that creation is the work of an animator. I do not think that the use of sliding cels, or things that merely pop on and off screen qualifies one as an animator.

The exploration of new techniques, filmic language, and subject matter is commendable and greatly needed. I only wish that more people had the resources—or that big-studio cartoon producers had the knowledge and desire—to combine these new things with good writing and real animation. The total film is what counts, whether it comes from a "factory" or an "independent."

I hope you are not one of those who equates Kathy Rose with John Hubley and Frank Mouris with Oskar Fischinger. So many young people in animation seem to feel, in contemplating the work of "independents," that "It ain't much, but it's ours." Personally, I'd rather study (and try to emulate) the *real* achievements of animation — even if I have to go back 30 years to find most of them.

Several readers took exception to my negative reviews of Wizards *and* Raggedy Ann & Andy. *One of them was John Sparey, an animator and layout artist for Ralph Bakshi, the director of* Wizards.

From JOHN SPAREY: Which title do you prefer: "The Barrier of Ill Tidings" or "The Great Stonewall Barrier"?

Anyway, you are lucky that you won't have to see *The Lord of the Rings*. With your preformed opinions, *you* can review it *now*. It must be a great comfort to have the knack of arriving at a permanent opinion and never having to worry about changing it.

Can your present writings be presumed to show the sound judgment, wit, insight, and open-mindedness you will use in writing your history of animation? Will it be worthy to share a shelf with *The Oxford Companion to Film* [which was panned in No. 17] or the Abrams edition of *The Hobbit*? Would it seem fair to prejudge your book as biased and opinionated? Now Richard Shale [author of an article on the Disney studio during World War II in No. 17] would seem to be an animation historian eminently qualified to take over from you.

If you don't know Richard Schickel, you should. You seem to have so much in common.

Wendy Pini also thought I was too harsh on Wizards. *She is an artist whose work has appeared in science-fiction magazines.*

From WENDY PINI: This has to be approximately the 557th letter I've written in defense of Bakshi's *Wizards*. Your review of the film was surprisingly intolerant, and I'd like to counterbalance this with some opinions of my own.

Ralph *is* clumsy and hard-handed at times, but he is also capable of needle-sharp poignance, which bespeaks hidden sensitivity in his street-fighter's soul. *Wizards* is certainly bizarre and incongruous in many ways. The story lacks depth and continuity. But for all that, there are many charming moments in the film, and a level of emotional maturity that no other American animated feature has ever touched.

Ninety-nine per cent of the viewing public knows next to nothing about sword and sorcery. It is a genre that has been almost totally ignored by filmmakers. Aware of this, Ralph broke new ground simply in the concept of a film like *Wizards*. What might appear as a pastiche of cliches to the fantasy fan seems very innovative to Joe Average. There is no question that *Wizards* is making money. *Somebody* likes it.

I think Ralph understands the dark side of things, the seductive quality of evil, better than any other animator. This is what sword and sorcery is all about. Whatever anachronisms abound in *Wizards*, the brooding, festering mood of imminent doom is never broken. The humor is black, and death is sudden and bloody. Unlike Disney, Ralph never pulls his punches. He does not patronize his audience.

Elinor, Avatar, and Peace are obviously Bode-influenced. But I, for one, was absolutely charmed by Weehawk. He, at least, is an original—a rotten-tempered, feisty little squirt. Yet I found his moments of tenderness (holding Elinor and stroking her hair) to be no less touchingly awkward than the chief alien's smile in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. In fact, the elves in *Wizards* possessed enough humility and dignity to make them very sympathetic. There is something symbolic in small creatures with great courage. Man, at his best, is but a brave speck in the Devil's eye.

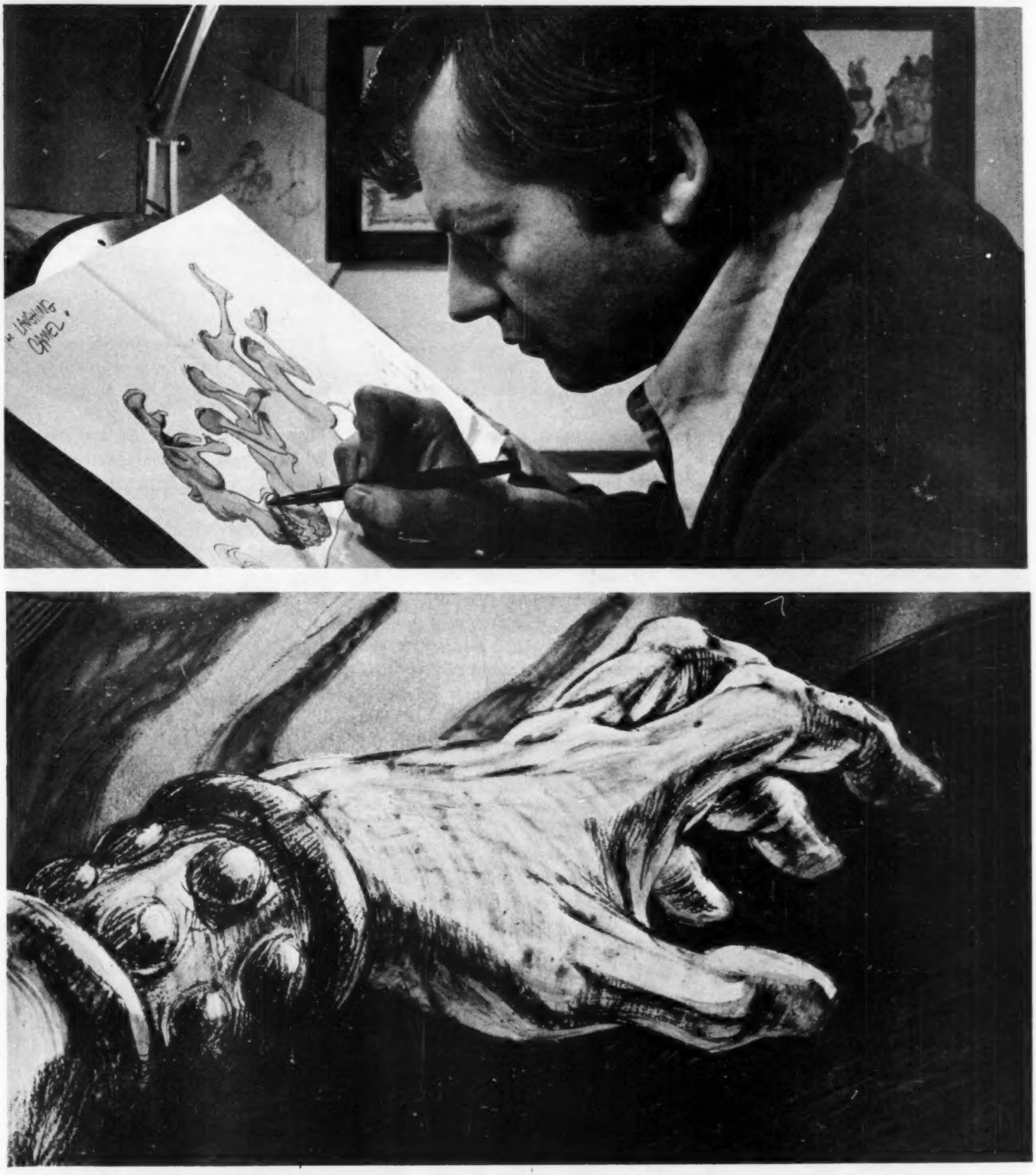
Ralph took a gamble with *Wizards*. The public ate it up. *He* did not stick to formula. *He* was brave enough to try a new style, a new story line, and new techniques. As a director, Ralph has some shortcomings—but thank God! Slickness does not necessarily mean quality. Diamonds in the dust bin often stand out more brightly, just as some of the truly beautiful sequences in *Wizards* offset whatever clumsiness was there.

*Howard Cruse, an underground cartoonist (*Barefootz*), disagreed with me about* Raggedy Ann & Andy.

From HOWARD CRUSE: I always enjoy your commentary, even when I disagree. And I do have to disagree with your dismissal of *Raggedy Ann & Andy*. Not that you are wrong in your technical criticisms; I suppose that your well-practiced eyes catch more on the run than mine. But my cumulative experience with that movie—despite its flaws—was really positive. I felt more outright affection for Raggedy Ann, Andy, and the Camel than I have felt for a generation's sampling of Disney characters. There's a matter-of-factness about the yearnings and the heroism that for me was like drinking fresh water after years of Kool-Aid. And what can I say to your characterization of the music as "wretched," since I found Raposo's tunes quite memorable and fun? They seem solidly in place in my list of frequently hummed songs, and the most "sentimental" of them are not cloying because the emotions being expressed are ones of straightforward friendship, mutual protectiveness, and basic good-heartedness—rather accessible feelings that do me the courtesy of keeping their hands off my tear ducts.

I had my own criticism of the movie. Some individual sections seemed derivative of everything from *Mary Poppins* to *Yellow Submarine*. The structure was awkward at times—probably due to the chopping that grew out of last-minute bureaucratic interference. Since I've moved to New York, I too have run into a number of participants in the production, and it's clear that most are disheartened that the film fell so far short of their goals.

However, I saw in that movie a fable about the emotions attendant as we move from comfortable playrooms into the "deep, deep woods." It spoke of taking responsibility for friends, of accepting eccentricities, of facing down cynicism, and of valuing communities. These themes are fundamental and valuable; they are treated with humor and lots of care in this film. You've spelled out what you feel are shortcomings, and in some cases I agree, but I have to put in a few words of defense. *Raggedy Ann & Andy*, like its Camel with the Wrinkled Knees, may not be quite "all there," but it's got a floppy integrity that I admire.



Richard Williams, Reaching

An Interview

In one respect, animated television commercials are like the graffiti on New York subway cars: the form typically defeats any creative energy that is applied to it. However dazzling a commercial may be, its sole purpose is to sell us something. If the commercial transcends that purpose—if it moves us to laughter or tears—the animator has muffed the job. You cannot reconcile joy or sorrow with the urge to rush out and buy a new Chevrolet or a box of corn flakes. Commercials can afford to be clever, but nothing more.

The most interesting commercials are those that are not only clever but suggest great power in reserve. "We could do much more," such commercials seem to say, "if only we were free to do so." Seeing such a commercial is a little like seeing a movie star carrying a sandwich board; we are conscious of the message and of the artist almost hidden behind it. The one adds piquancy to the other. There is some of this feeling in the commercials made by John Hubley's studio years ago, and in some animated recently by Bill Littlejohn.

Of recent commercials, the most interesting by far is the 30-second commercial made this year for Jovan Sex Appeal, a men's cologne, by Richard Williams at his new Hollywood studio. The animation—done almost entirely by Williams himself—is in the graphic style of Frank Frazetta, and is based on "Against the Gods," a Frazetta poster (reproduced as Plate 66 in *Frank Frazetta, Book 2*). In Williams' hands, Frazetta's melodramatic posturing is transformed into remarkably realistic animation, leavened with wit. (The symbolism—the Frazetta character draws his sword just after applying the Sex Appeal to his face—is a little hard to miss.) The result is a bit of film that is faithful to the best of Frazetta, and yet is free of Frazetta's excesses. Frazetta has never looked as good, and, probably, neither has Williams.

Richard Williams is a 45-year-old Canadian who has spent most of his professional life in England, where he heads a studio that has made scores of commercials for television and movie theaters. Because of the quality of his work, Williams has often been compared to Walt Disney, but he is infinitely superior to Disney himself as a draftsman, and as an animator. He need not, as Disney did, rely on others to put his thoughts onto film.

So far, Williams has not abandoned animation to concentrate on direction. It is doubtful that any other well-known director has contributed nearly as many drawings to his own films as Williams has. *Raggedy Ann & Andy* (1977), the first feature on which Williams received direction credit, is filled with the director's own clean-ups and in-betweens. That is, to say the least, unusual.

Before *Raggedy Ann*, Williams had enjoyed more than a dozen years of great critical (and sometimes financial) success as a director of commercials, shorts, feature-film titles, and television specials. *Raggedy Ann*, however, was a distinct failure with most critics and with the public.

Although Williams cannot be absolved of blame for many of *Raggedy Ann & Andy*'s shortcomings, the film was probably doomed by its wretched screenplay and its producers' ineptitude before Williams ever became associated with it. The real test of his abilities as a feature-film director will be *The Thief and the Cobbler*, a comedy-fantasy with a Middle Eastern setting, which will be entirely under his control.

It will be the test, that is, if we ever get to see it. Work on *The Thief* began in 1964; it has since undergone several name changes, reshuffling of the cast (Nasruddin, the principal character in the original version, was dropped entirely), and a gradual expansion of its projected length. A few years ago, it was to be a 78-minute film; today, with 70 minutes of animation completed, Williams speaks of a two-hour film, to be released in perhaps three years. If it is indeed finished in 1981, *The Thief and the Cobbler* will have been in work for 17 years, and Williams himself will be almost 50 years old. By contrast, work on *Snow White* took a little more than three years, and the film had its premiere a few days after Walt Disney's 36th birthday.

Seventeen years is a terribly long time to work on anything, and some among Williams' friends doubt that *The Thief* will ever be completed. It would not be the first time that an artist had deliberately postponed the completion of a work into which he had sunk so much of his psychological capital. Postpartum depression is always unpleasant, but what must it be like after a 17-year pregnancy—especially if, God forbid, the child is stillborn? Animation needs *The Thief* now, as it needed it 10 years ago, but the longer the film is in production, the greater the danger that it will seem a stale irrelevancy when it is finally released. The film's chances for success may have been greater—and the prospect of failure less daunting—if it had been completed years ago.

All of that is speculation, though. What is real, and very satisfying, is Williams' work as the animator and director of the Jovan commercial. Last June, *Funnyworld*'s associate editor, Milt Gray, talked to Williams about the commercial, his Hollywood studio, and his plans for the future. The transcript of their interview follows.

Mike Barrier

Gray: How did the Jovan commercial spot come to you?

Williams: We had just opened [the studio] in California, and I was coming through Chicago from London to California. We have a representative in Chicago, Tom Parker, and we had made American commercials about 10 years ago in England for Chicago. So one of the fellows that we had done Yellow Pages stuff for, Bill Pittman, was the creative guy on Jovan. And since he knew me, he said they were going to have Arnold Schwarzenegger go up a mountain, and kind of matte in prehistoric birds and stuff. "But do you think you could animate it instead?" And I said, "Sure." They had the Frazetta poster which Jovan had bought the [rights for], which they were going to run as their press ad—the poster of the guy on the cliff with his sword up and the lightning. So I said, "Gee, don't do it in live action, I could certainly [animate] it and I'd [draw] it [in the style

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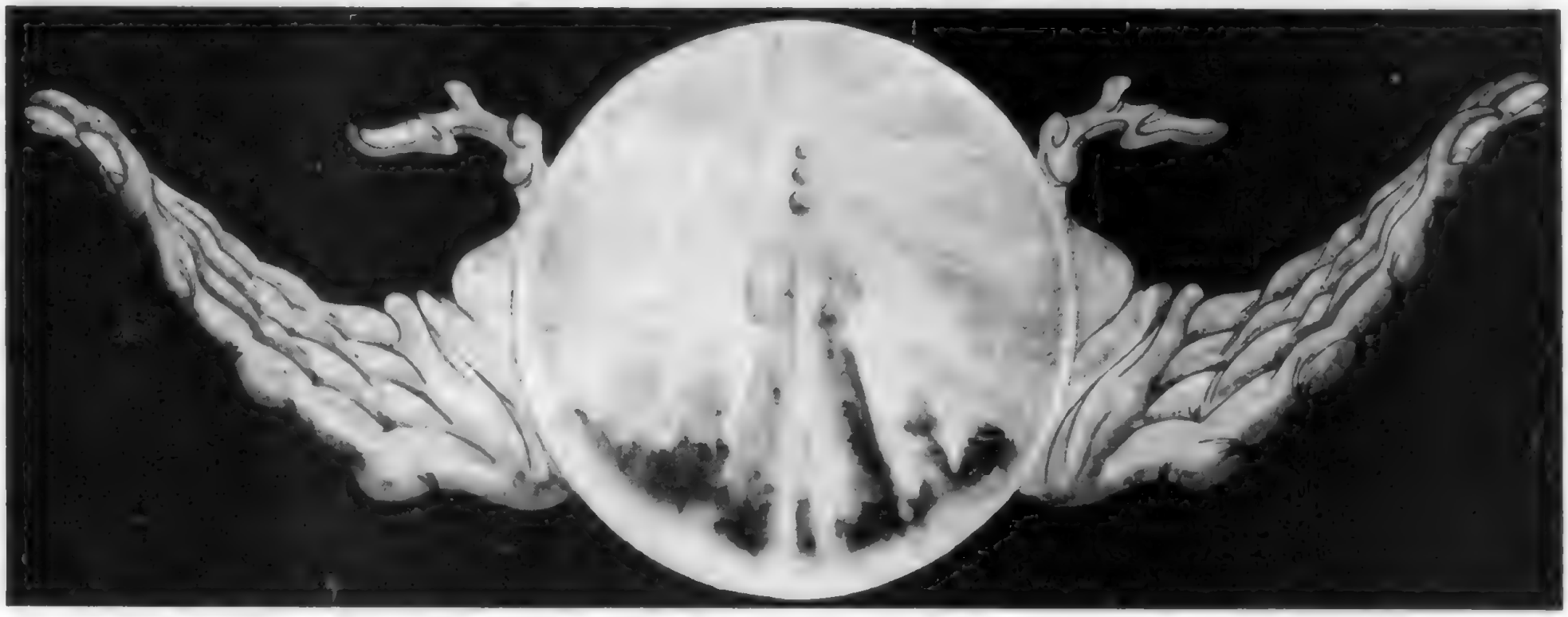
Scenes from Williams' uncompleted feature, The Thief and the Cobbler.



of] Frazetta." And Bill took a flier on me and said, "Okay."

Gray: Was the commercial done with Frazetta's official okay?

Williams: Yes. Apparently he was very enthusiastic. Either Jovan or J. Walter Thompson told Frazetta, "We'll make an animated film of [the poster]," and he said, "Great, great!" I have had no contact with Frazetta.

Gray: Was Frazetta involved in the film in any way, beyond just giving his okay?

Williams: No. It was just me and the agency and his poster. And so I went out and bought all the Frazetta books. I made a sort of scrapbook of his work, and I tried to do [the commercial] as he would have done if he were an animator. So that was our first job in our Hollywood studio.

Gray: How long did it take to do the commercial?

Williams: Six weeks, from start to finish.

Gray: You must have been working day and night.

Williams: Yeah, Christmas Day, Christmas Eve—New Year's Day, New Year's Eve. You see, in the old days over here when we worked from England we were known to be kind of slow and very expensive, and this was such a nice job to get, as the first job, that I thought, gee, if we could come in right on time—and they gave us this ridiculous date. We made it, and then they took two months to sort of polish it. That is, we polished the package shot—we didn't get the package shot done right the first time, we didn't really have time. The bottle had to be [animated] with all the lettering, it took a lot of time.

Gray: You did all the animation and in-betweens yourself, didn't you?

Williams: Yes. I had help, though. There's an illustrator, Rebecca Mills—she painted the backgrounds, in oil. If we could have had a little longer than six weeks we could have painted the cels the same way. We did, a little, Rebecca and I, but we didn't have time to do it as lavishly as we could have. But I'm pleased with it, it's one of the few jobs I'm pleased with.

Gray: I heard you animated the commercial directly on the cels.

Williams: [I used] a German pencil called a Mars Omnichrome. Unfortunately it's been discontinued. They've been used for marking people for operations but they're toxic, they give lead poisoning. So all those similar products have been discontinued world wide. So we had everybody in every country buying up the last bits, because our whole studio in London works with it, and I do all my stuff with it, that I can. Except our feature, which is ink and paint.

Gray: You did all your shading on the cels with this pencil, didn't you?

Williams: We used everything. We used oil, chalk, acrylics . . .

Gray: When you say chalk, do you mean on the backgrounds or on the cels?

Williams: The backgrounds. If we do a sequel to Jovan, I'm going to use chalk with transparent paint right on the cels.

Gray: You're going to be using frosted cels?

Williams: No, normal cels will take a lot of stuff. People just don't [experiment] enough. If you use shadow paint, transparent paint, the chalk will go right onto that. I even use watercolor direct on cels. That rubs off, though, if you're not careful, and if you have to reshoot it starts to fall off the cels. Most people use the production line system and I don't. So whatever will go on, I put on, and it's surprising what will go on. And will *stay* on, if the cels are handled carefully once they're finished.

On the Jovan commercial, the music helped us enormously. Don Peistrup, a California guy, did a beautiful job. In fact, he did two pieces of music, he got excited about it, and he did two pieces to the same click track with a 40-piece orchestra. And what we did was use the front of one and the end of the other. We mixed over from one to the other, half way through. But Don was marvelous. We had everything going for us on that. I really enjoyed it. There was no compromise. The politics were looked after by the agency, with their own client, and we were left free to work. That's the best way to do it.

Gray: That's kind of unusual in the commercial world, isn't it?

Williams: Yeah. But in London we get that, because we've sold so much product for them, they tend to leave us alone.

Gray: Do you see a use for the Frazetta style beyond this commercial, such as a feature film?

Williams: No, it would be a disaster. It's tough to sustain for 30 seconds, it takes forever. Animators tend not to draw certain things, it's too much work. Good draftsmen usually want to go into illustration, and animators, with very few exceptions, couldn't go out and make their living as illustrators. I guess the reason I do what I do is that I was a painter and an illustrator. In London, Dick Purdom is a very good draftsman, and Russell Hall, and some of the other guys are pretty good. But in Hollywood they don't seem to draw very much. Milt Kahl is a wonderful draftsman, and Marc Davis . . .

Gray: Are you going to do a sequel commercial?

Williams: J. Walter Thompson, the agency, is considering it. It'll be Samuel H. Sime. It's more complex than Frazetta. The problem is, [the agency] was trying to give it to me without a storyboard, and I said, "Hell, no. You've got to do the storyboard first, and then we'll go up from there."

Gray: Did you have a storyboard on the Frazetta commercial?

Williams: Mary Aries at JWT had done a very simple little feminine story-telling board—not at all saccharine, just little, clear pictures. I was amazed when we had finished the commercial, that I had really followed what she had done. The shots were more or less what she had planned. You don't have to draw a storyboard well if it's a story-telling board; you can go haywire with tricks later.

The second [commercial] would be the female version—she's got captive men, an isle of lost men. The sequel would be much tougher. But it wouldn't be Frazetta. They'd give me my head a little more.

Gray: What are your future plans for your Hollywood studio?

Williams: We're a branch of the London studio. I live here mostly, though. For 10 years we were going to

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Scenes from "Jovan—The Power," Williams' acclaimed commercial for a men's cologne.

set up in Hollywood, and never quite got around to it. The Americans, like Art Babbitt or Ken Harris or Emery Hawkins, and now Tissa David, if they work for us in England they have to pay English taxes. It's okay for us who live in England, but the standard of living is so much higher in America, we can't ask those people to cut their wages, and that's what happens with English tax. So we had to have a source of income in America just to pay those people. Plus, why shouldn't we be in Hollywood? So I'm actually doing the commercials, with some of the other guys and Art Babbitt—we're working in the same room—and he's working on the feature all the time. So I get to contribute over his shoulder. Emery Hawkins is working in New Mexico, and he comes into Hollywood every now and then, and we work well together. So we're just developing, like in London, an independent, self-supporting studio that does commercials, and the profit is pumped into *The Thief*. And now we've got a small staff, about nine, and they're all on *The Thief* this month, Bob Bachman is there, Lester Pegues, Tom Roth, Jim Logan, Art [Babbitt], me, and Carol Cook—that's six artists, and then two on the business side. We're trying to go up very slowly, though, and build solidly.

The only reason I left the studio [in London] and took on the horrific *Raggedy Ann* assignment was to become bankable. Because I thought, if I do this four-and-a-half-million dollar movie, that makes me bankable. And then we can easily get money to complete *The Thief*. It just works that way—if you've done a big thing, that's a credit. What happened was, I did become bankable, but the lesson I learned was the Golden Rule: "Whoever has the gold makes the rules." Whoever has the monetary control of the picture controls the picture. So they can do what they like with it, they can control the story, the way you work, fire the key people if they want, bring in idiots, lock you away in a room, do anything they like. That isn't going to happen on *The Thief*. I won't accept the money. We're quite powerful in London—self supportive—and we've earned our own money and we spend very, very heavily on *The Thief*. We've put in well over a million dollars already. And that would have been profit. Now if the California studio is as strong, which it is rapidly becoming, we'll have two sources of income which allows us to advance the picture. Then all I'll need to do is get finishing money from some outfit or whatever, and that's not gonna screw up the picture because the real creative work is done. All that's left is finishing production. We think we can finish *The Thief* in two or three years, but I would go indefinitely rather than have the picture wrecked. If we get finishing money, we could complete it in two. We have 70 minutes in pencil test now. We changed the picture all around six or seven years ago, but the Thief himself, which we invented, was all done by Ken Harris for the past 10 years, and he's virtually finished that character. All the good work [from the original start] we kept. We threw out all the garbage, and the main character which I had done. It's just a question of money now—if we sold out, we could do it quick. But *Raggedy Ann*, which I had virtually no control over, cured me of that. *The Thief and the Cobbler* is my picture. If it's gonna be good or bad, I'm going to be responsible for it. On *Raggedy Ann* I had a very silly contract—I was contracted only for two weeks of every month, and I was supposed to be just a supervisor. I kind of got pushed into being the official director. But there were very many chefs in that thing. And I was coming in and out, trying to keep to my contract, and work on *The Thief* the other two weeks, and I just got trapped, and had to work [on *Raggedy Ann*] all the time--for the same money--and really had no control over it.

And maybe I'm naive about just how it is in America, but when I got on *Raggedy Ann* and had to go through all these meetings all the time, I kept saying, "All this talk doesn't get you anywhere, folks, we have to work—I have to work!" But they don't want you to work over here, they want you to be the front man, and you have a bunch of gnomes to do the animation. That's the pattern. And that's one reason we're so small in California. We could have opened big, but I want to build it the way *we* work. I'll front it, but hell, I work—I don't spend my life beating my gums.

From Williams' titles for The Return of the Pink Panther *(1975).*

'A Quick, Delightful Gink'

Eric Knight at the Walt Disney Studio

By DAVID CULBERT

The *Why We Fight* series, the seven orientation films made by Frank Capra for the United States government, remain a monument to documentary film. It is generally known that the animation for these films was done at the Walt Disney studio, but animators themselves have attached little significance to Disney's role, for no new animation techniques were developed. However, the precision with which maps and animated diagrams were done and the use of animation to explain concepts distinguish the *Why We Fight* series from any other documentaries ever produced. The crude, unimaginative animation in the British *Desert Victory* and John Huston's *Battle of San Pietro*, to name two justly regarded wartime examples, reminds us of how much more Disney's men did, in combination with a creative mind outside the field of animation proper.

The Walt Disney Archives has contracts for each of the *Why We Fight* films, but until I gained access to the letters of Eric Knight, there seemed little way of documenting the actual process of Disney's work on the Capra-unit films. Then came a piece of wonderful good fortune. Knight's widow, Jere Knight, let me use the extraordinary file of letters she still has in her possession as part of the research for my book about the American military's use of film in World War II.

Eric Knight was born in Yorkshire, England, in 1897. His father died when he was three. Knight emigrated to America in 1915, attended art school in Boston, and eventually became a newspaperman. He turned to film criticism for the Philadelphia *Public Ledger*, 1929-1934, went to Hollywood as a writer, and promptly found himself on a salary with nothing to do. Totally frustrated, he turned to writing novels. He achieved success with the publication of *The Flying Yorkshireman* but today is best remembered for *Lassie Come Home*. In 1941 he wrote the number-one best seller, *This Above All*, which Anatole Litvak directed in the 1942 screen version of the same title.

Knight went to work for Frank Capra's film unit in April 1942, first in Washington, returning to Hollywood in June. He played a principal role in working out the basic plan for the *Why We Fight* series, wrote versions of most of the scripts, and then because of a longstanding fascination with animation was assigned to the Disney studio in July to work out details of animation inserts. Knight had an infectious personality but became frustrated by Hollywood's extravagant ways. He returned east in September. He died in a plane crash off the coast of Dutch Guiana on January 14, 1943, while on the way to Cairo to set up a new plan for Allied radio programming.

Eric Knight made an important contribution to the Army's attempts to build morale, not just in film, but in print also. Though he never became a polished screenwriter, he did produce a significant body of film criticism. He never could quite decide which part of him was English and which American. Such ambivalence made him a superb choice to promote England's cause to an American audience, for he sensed how to explain what both countries needed to know about the other's most cherished beliefs.

Those interested in Knight's activities in the 1930s should consult Paul Rotha, ed., *Portrait of a Flying Yorkshireman: Letters from Eric Knight in the United States to Paul Rotha in England* (London, 1952), an obscure book that deserves to be reprinted. Knight wrote to Rotha about his assignment to the Capra unit but most of their 1942 correspondence related to *World of Plenty*, a film on which the two men collaborated across the Atlantic and which premiered after Knight's death.

Knight was awarded the Legion of Merit posthumously; the following portion of the Citation (written by novelist Paul Horgan, who also worked in the Capra unit) suggests Knight's value to the war effort:

> Believing in the value of the written word and the power of ideas, Major Knight threw himself with whole heart and inspiring energy into the mission of discovering for the armed forces of the United States that conviction of purpose by which citizens become soldiers and armies become great. Most of the War Information films, including *Prelude to War*, which have helped so well to condition troops mentally for the fight, bear the fruit of Major Knight's constructive ideas.

Knight to Paul Rotha, April 17, 1942

Forty-five has got me, boy, and I'm no longer young . . . But I'm happiest because I've got a good job. Frank Capra wired me . . . Disney swiping finale of *Flying Yorkshireman* for his Dumbo film.

Knight to Jere, Washington, July 8

We had a long conference at Frank's house last night. It seems we are all reorganized and will move to the coast . . . We

are supposed to have five films done on August 14th . . .

I am still busy – deep in the heart of Russia [*Battle of Russia*]. When I finish the Russia script and the Far East Script [*Battle of China*], I have done the whole series. I want to cut a film before I'm through, but everyone's asking so many favors right now of Frank that he is harassed.

Knight to Jere, Hollywood, Sunday [*c. July 15*]

Tomorrow a coupla generals come in and I go to work with them at Disneys on the map animations.

Knight to Jere, July 18

I'm glad Lyman [Colonel Lyman Munson, Capra's boss in the Pentagon] is for me. I'm glad he likes the scripts. Maybe I need support. We had a battle royal here and I told Capra and [Anatole] Litvak what I thought aplenty. Litvak is still rewriting my script with Tony Veiller doing it. I said to hell with it. If I wrote scripts, and in conference with Frank wrote final drafts, and after that any director just changed it as he pleased, then they didn't need me. All they needed was a stenographer . . .

We saw Disney, and he's in a pickle not knowing what to do because nobody gives him a script to shoot from. Then we saw [Darryl] Zanuck, who is a prick—prying stuff loose from the producers for the war effort, too, and yet feeling that he and they are really giving up something.

Zanuck wanted on every one of our films the "Oscar" and the words "Presented by the U.S.A. and with the cooperation of the Motion Picture Industry."

Knight to Jere, July 25

Scripting at Disney's all day. [Edgar] Peterson came in, and we're trying to graft all the excellent footage he has to the military campaign sequences we inherited from someone who worked at Disney's before we came here . . .

We had fun with Disney . . . At lunch the Disney chaps working on the sequences said: "What did you write?"

Knight to Jere, July 31

Today at Disney's I met Ducky Someone [Clarence Nash] who, invited to greet me professionally, opened his mouth and out from nowhere came Donald Duck saying: "Hello Captain Knight!" . . .

I've written one of these scripts ten times without any pause in between, starting a new one before the last is even typed by the girls. Everyone who comes in has an "idea" and puts it in, and seems to take it for granted that "anyone can write a script" . . . I have to stop regular officers putting in the France script [*Divide and Conquer*] the phrases 'Phoney War'. They seem indignant and want to know what Britain did in the sitzkrieg. I ask them, "What did America do?"

Knight to Jere, August 2

We have a script at last mimeographed. It is awful, containing all the weaknesses of every one of the ten men who have stuck bits on it . . .

I am working at the Disney plant.

Knight to Jere, August 3

Two Disney boys who are working with us—a director and a head artist in charge of animation . . . And [Dick] Kelsey, the artist . . . Tonight I saw traffic arrows on the sidewalk, and I thought—Ha, route of attack! That's from thinking in terms of Disney films. I want to make a terrain board and shoot down on it.

Knight to Jere, August 6

I heard sound tracks today of my first film [*The Nazis Strike*]—really the second one as Tola [Litvak] is doing all the first [*Prelude to War*] . . . We have to have one to cut Disney animation to. It is a long, tedious job, and we are working all Sweden and the Lowlands out now by drawing hundreds of pictures, putting them on a big board, and walking past reciting commentary. It is the only way the Disney men can work, but a good way because it constantly reminds you of what the eye is seeing. I like it.

I had a fifteen minute talk with Walt yesterday—just about his films and what I liked and what he said about why they are what they are and how they kept Stokie [Leopold Stokowski] from fiddling with blasting the ears off the sound track by telling him that the union forbade his touching them. Disney said no sound track yet could have caught the lows the way Sto wanted them, nor carried the highs without distortion. He is a nice guy and I like him. Quicker than Frank [Capra]—but Frank under his slow sweetness is more really imbued with love of democracy and the people than any of us. He really burns about this way of life, but hasn't the equipment to say it hard and clearly. He must emotionalize it. I can put it clearly, but am not as forgiving as Frank.

The illustrations for this article are caricatures of Eric Knight by Dick Kelsey, a Disney layout man who worked with Knight at the studio.

Knight to Jere, August 10

The General [Frederick H. Osborn, commanding general for what became the Army's Information and Education Division, of which Capra's unit was a part] arrived and we had lunch with Disney and so on, with a good deal of kidding about Knight . . . I must finish this third script [*Divide and Conquer*] so as not to hold up the Disney men. I cannot finish it because Col. Van Horne hasn't given me the military data.

Disney, to go back, is good fun. He is always trying to wangle an idea out of me. He has one now about the Grumlets, little Irish fairies of the air, who live over Britain. Grumlets have suction cups on their feet and can stand on the wing of a Spitfire. Gremlins have no suction cups, and live in nests they build in the airplane rigging. Grumlets have augurs, and bore holes in planes like machine-gun bullet holes. And so on—he is a queer, quick, delightful gink with more capabilities rolled into one man than even me. I like Disney immensely, but just laugh off any ideas of work or giving ideas for his films.

Knight to Jere, n.d. [*c. August 11*]

Yesterday I took him [General Osborn] over some of our much-involved Disney work which I haven't at all managed to simplify as I should.

We worked until 8 p.m. last night and then out to Frank's for buffet supper and the General talked to the whole gang of us . . . Zanuck spoke, the General spoke, Frank spoke, and then asked me to speak . . . Everything here is grand and the Disney boys are really top to work with. So damned cheerful and cooperative and able.

Knight to Jere, August 12

Find what your major principle is, and say it.

I'll give you an example. We have miles of military detail on campaign in Norway, and it piles up and piles up until we have two equal sides one very good as an army gang and the other very bad that gets licked—and the detail f----s the whole thing up and the Germans end looking magnificent and the British awful.

When that happens, I back right out of the script and think: "What the hell am I trying to say."

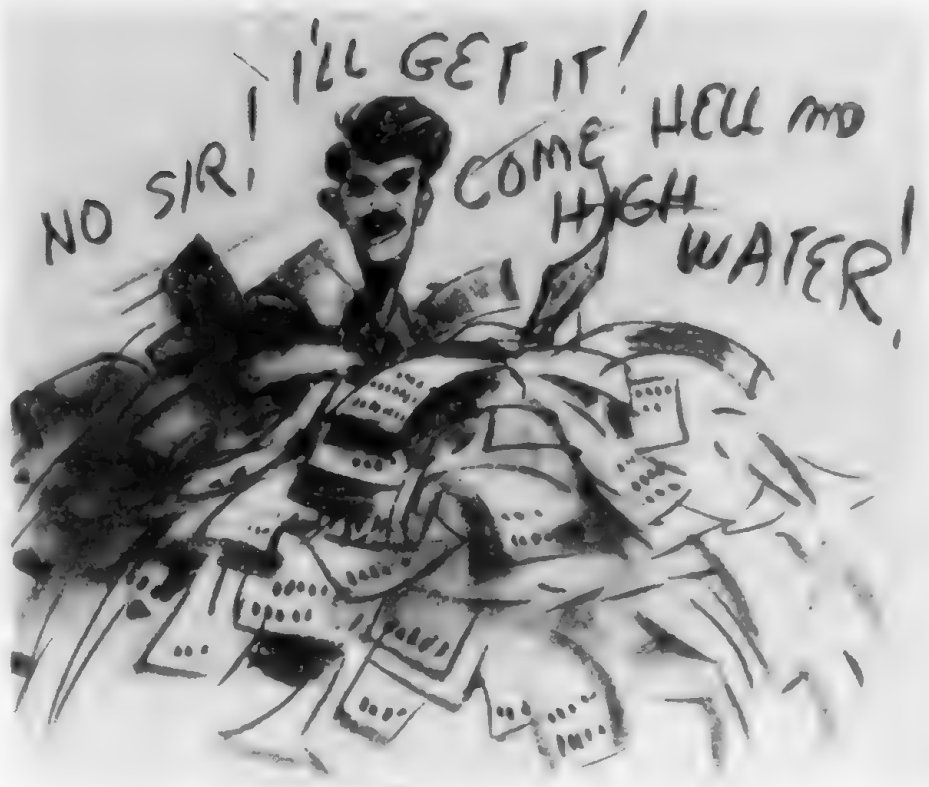
I know what I am trying to say in that film [*Divide and Conquer*]. It is a truth that these goddam murdering, megalomaniacal Nazi bastards without the slightest regard for the peace and gentleness of Norway stomped in and raped the country of its honor and neutrality.

O.K., then let's say that, and if we say that and never get anything said about military movements, we've said the thing that matters.

Knight to Jere, n.d. [*c. August 13*]

Dammit, the Germans came through Eban Emaul in two days. We can't write a script on it in three months . . .

I am hackwriting the last awful commentation of the third script again.



Knight to Jere, August 16

The Disney studio below is recording Grieg loud as hell and I work amid music below my toes . . .

I'll continue working at Disneys to keep getting out the maps. It is slow, tedious, exacting, fascinating work.

Knight to Jere, August 17

Disney has noontime shows twice a week for a half hour. Just saw some fine Canadian films for war savings that look like color cartoon things—half cartoon and half-abstract shapes to music. Really they're all scratched and painted right on the film itself. It's a wonderful method and very jumpy but highly effective. Also saw Disney's Ugly Duckling—a sweet little film. Also Schlesinger Rabbit film—stolen from Disney's Max Hare. Remember? . . .

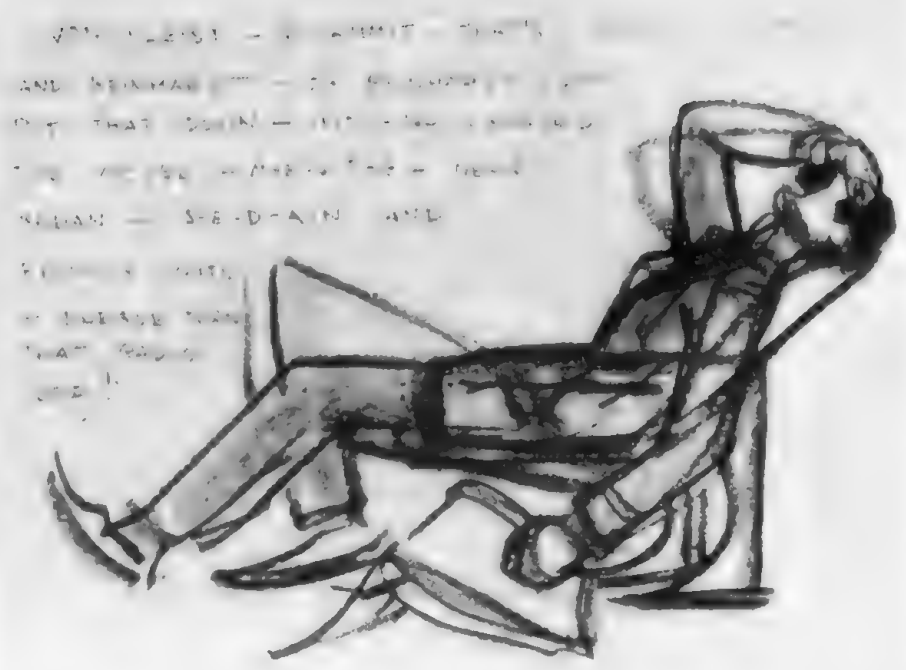
There's nothing else to report, excepting working on the script and getting it fine and finer. We do about every fiftieth drawing and put it in succession on a board. We all have a sort of drawing premier day after tomorrow and bring Frank over to see it. Frank loves conferences. Every one I've ever seen broke up in a shambles.

I think Tola is shooting about $20,000 worth of production alone, which will make his first film [*Prelude to War*] run maybe $70,000 or so—an enormous price for the simplicity I first drew up in Washington. By now it's almost a Class A film with enough footage to be one half a double feature.

Knight to Jere, August 17

This noon I talked with Walt. He is receptive, and we kid. He wants me to give him opinions on a swell idea—about Gremlins and Fifinellas and Widgets. Gremlins ride on RAF planes with suction cup boots and drill bullet holes in planes. Fifinellas are girl Gremlins—all cousins to a leprechaun. Widgets are young Gremlins born in a nest. I suggest he shoots the whole thing a mixture of real RAF and cartoon.

So we laugh at lunch and I can kid him any way I want . . . Then back after lunch to maps and more maps and the



military campaigns I love very much, and Walt comes in popping open the door once in a while to give valuable technical suggestions.

Knight to Jere, August 20

Apart from that, what is there to tell you? The script still drags on. Frank heard it with the board today—the board where we pin maps and sketches and says it is awful. It is. Now at last all nicely full of every bit of useless detail every specialist from Washington and West Point has managed to get in. So it's tedious, long, pointless, boring. I still know absolutely to a tee that the first script I did was best. I shall now offer it tomorrow as a brilliant new idea . . .

There is a swell gymnasium and diathermy place at Walt's—on a top floor. And all officers are treated free. Honest, that studio is the best place in a thousand miles of this dizzy place. The offhandedness of the place—the way no one is allowed to take anything seriously—even spelling. For instance, the streets are labelled with cutouts—"Mickey Avenue." "Dopey Drive," etc. The spelling is weird and wonderful. Like "IN BTWEEN DEPT." Of course "btween" is between. Can't be ozzerwise. The studio phone book lists all the many projection booths under "sweatboxes." At noon there's generally a half-hour movie shown in the theatre. Today showed *Listen to Britain* and Donald Duck. The first was uproariously applauded. Always good, interesting films that Walt wants his own people to see—at the last show were fine Canadian war bonds films, which were made not by animation but by direct application of scratches and color to the film itself—a frame at a time. What a technique, but what startling effects they got.

Walt thinks I'm aces—and is always kidding and asking me to work on a film RIGHT NOW. It's the only place I'd ever work in peacetime, because Walt's mind is light, funny and quick . . .

Knight to Jere, August 24

Colonel [Livingston] Watrous, the aide to the General, is here, and I took him to lunch. He had already become aware that I loathe this place and am not "happy" here, and asked me about it. I told him, I could not answer, for I was afraid my malaise might be colored by strictly personal reactions of my former life which must have no part in the army. Therefore I mistrusted my judgment on my anger at the present setup. He asked what that anger was.

I told him, I spoke badly, and therefore always like to argue with myself on a typewriter, but it just happened that I had argued recently and had:

A MANIFESTO OF DIRECTIVES FOR FILM IN WAR.

And he read it, and begged for it. I let him have it. Thus I write a letter to the General which is not a letter, and off the record I go over heads without going over them.

My short, simple thesis blasted all Hollywood methods of production, called for speed, renounced the esthetic, excoriated the shiny, exploded the myth of perfectionism, and returned film to fundamentals—its sturcture as a simple series of sight-sound images to produce mental impressions . . .

It questioned whether slickness and perfectionism of surface and involving of argument had anything to do with the force of the desired impact and the ultimate goal of producing certain effects in minds.

It ended with:

The Hollywood mind will say this is impossible. This war will be won by those who most vigorously deny that "impossible" peacetime standards have any relation to wartime.

Col. Watrous admits they are broken-hearted about the films, that they should have been out long ago. The General is losing faith and losing caste. They don't know enough to get those bastards and say: "You sons of bitches—give them in a week." They keep taking the dates set back further and further. They do not know yet that they are going to be further f---d and the delivery date set still further back – but it will be, mark my words. We shan't have a film out before October 15—if then. They should have been out Aug. 1.

All they know is—no film has come out of this mountainous writhing molehill yet. And I distrust what will come out.

Frank is a good lad, but a fool. He has availed himself not one whit of my talent, has asked me not one question about grand policy, sneers at the word "documentary," orders new scripts without reading old ones. He ordered another new one last night. To confound any charge of delay, I worked until 5 a.m. this morning and wrote the entire thing to his dictated commentary, which is ungrammatical. I tried to pull it in shape.

I have called his attention to the flagrant mistruths in data, and the grave errors of statement he has made.

Out of loyalty to the unit I must help make it as near perfect as I am allowed to do. But the thing is, no one will ever get over the Hollywood idea here that a writer is the lowest form of life—a sort of stenographer. By God, not me. And I do not want to linger on while they make "fair" films. I want to be out of here before any are made—and that leaves me lots of time.

Yet I am attached to Frank—but only as to an arrogant

child who presumes he knows much more than his accompanying adult. The Caesar complex these men have make them unable to listen. And my own ruthless uncompromise with what I consider a lesser mind makes our conjunction sterile—and will continue to do so. For I cannot be a stenographer. They do not need me—there are millions of typists and ex-newspaper and Hollywood writers who will do . . .

True, my feet are in Britain, but it was in America my head first reached up towards the cloud, and it is in the clouds one finds Gods. The humans I know and love are in Britain, true. The Gods I love are in America.

My Yorkshire voice is not false, for I do not think they would renounce me. At fourteen I left Britain behind and grew here trying to be faithful to memories. But I cannot help it, I lived and dreamed and grew up here.

And somehow, those forefathers—Lincoln and Washington and Franklin and Haym Solomon—and Valley Forge where we lived—they have become mine, too.

Somehow I do not think those men would mind me, who has so few forefathers of any kind of his own, borrowing them—I think they might let me be their step-son and call them mine.

For I truly honor their memories and do not pervert their words.

Knight to Bets [*Knight's daughter by first marriage*], *August 29*

Sometimes I get only two hours sleep out of 24 . . . Most of the time I'm at Disneys, and Walt is good fun.

Knight to Jere, August 30

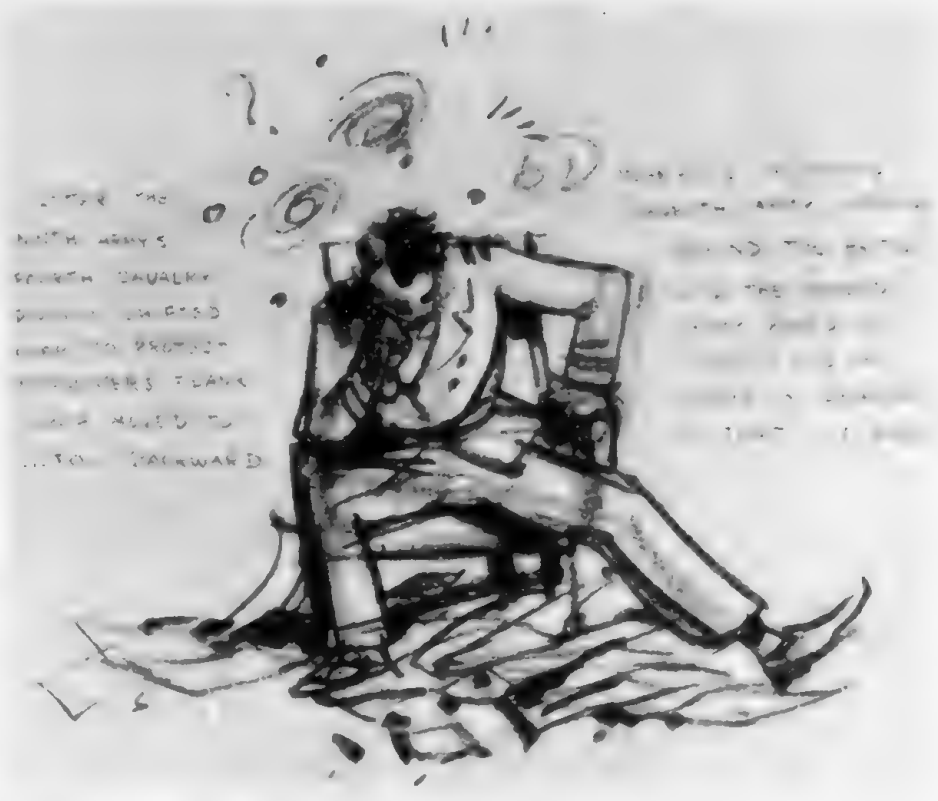
I pound away on scripts and try to pull into shape the diverse and awkwardly phrased ideas various lads contribute, and never quite manage to make the hodge-podge have any strong flow. Today we argued for nearly an hour over the phrase:

'France looked like an imposing castle, but Hitler's political termites had eaten away the cement that bound the stones together.' [Disney animation for *Divide and Conquer*]

Knight to Jere, September 1

When they stick in a metaphor about France being like a crumbling castle, and then add to it that political termites had eaten away the cement that bound the stones, I revolt. The metaphor is lousy anyhow, and the mixed metaphor is revolting, and anyone in the audience will howl—unless someone can produce a mortar-eating termite. [Disney solved this by having little Nazi Hackenkreuzes do the eating.]

It is silly christly stuff like that that I can battle for four hours—and even then the bastards beat you and just put it in the script as if you were a child who had not to be considered.



Knight to Jere, September 4

The radio division [of Information and Education] under Tom Lewis is going places fast and is producing—which should be even more of a challenge to the film men.

Well, I'm at Disneys, and all cleared up with odd papers collected and destroyed and confidential data either destroyed or returned to proper places.

Well, so another Hollywood voyage is over . . . I had lots of "offers"—Walt wanted me to do the Gremlin story for cartoon films.

Handwritten letter, General Osborn to Mrs. Knight, January 1943

Eric was the most loved officer in the Division. We loved him for his kindness and humor and courtesy, his penetrating ideas and his way of putting them, his deep indignation at all cruelty and meanness and his all consuming devotion to the cause. It was this universal feeling about what the war meant for all humanity that made him so much an inspiration to all of us . . .

When we saw Frank Capra's last picture together, we all had tears in our eyes, Eric most of all, as Eric said, We shouldn't be ashamed to weep, this is the greatest tragedy that ever came to man.

We were all his devoted friends, and our hearts go out to you.

Walt Disney to Mrs. Knight, January 22, 1943

All of us here, who worked with Eric, had a tremendous respect and admiration for him.

David Culbert, who teaches history at Louisiana State University, has written often on the United States government's use of film during World War II.

From La Traversee de L'atlantique a la Rame, *the grand prize winner.*

You Can't Go To Ottawa '76 Again

An Anticlimactic Festival for '78

By MICHAEL SPORN

The international body of animators known as ASIFA sanctions one, sometimes two, animation festivals each year. These festivals have usually been held in Annecy, France (site of the first ASIFA-sponsored function), or Zagreb, Yugoslavia. (France and Yugoslavia usually have offered assistance in the financing of these festivals, which cost anywhere from $100,000 to $250,000 to organize.)

In 1976, Mamaia, Romania, was scheduled to act as host of this annual event, but it was evident in January of that year that Mamaia would be in no condition to host anything. Floods had swept the area, causing irreparable damage and leaving the country with greater things to finance than animation festivals. Canada came to the rescue. They had wanted the event for several years and were unable to convince the body of ASIFA's board of governors that they were to be taken seriously. They received sanction, placed the event in Ottawa, and began advertising immediately. Within the relatively short

period of six months, a first-class animation festival—complete with hours of competing films, retrospectives and prizes—was under way.

The unique aspect of Ottawa '76 (the first festival officially recognized by ASIFA on the North American continent) was its workshop. A group of devoted workers, under the guidance of Co Hoedeman, organized a room filled with projectors, animation cameras, light boxes, and anything else needed to make and view films. There was a non-stop scheduling of speakers (Alexandre Alexeieff, Lotte Reiniger, Tissa David, Don Arioli, Norman McLaren, and anyone else they could connect with at the main part of the festival), film screenings, and animating by anyone who was ready to try his hand at the craft. (For the first time, members of the press were given the opportunity of learning first-hand what it was like to be on the other side of the stop-motion camera.)

The workshop alone was enough to make Ottawa '76 a success. But in addition, extraordinary films such as Caroline Leaf's *The Street*, Jacques Drouin's *Mindscape*, and Paul Driessen's *Antique Box* were unveiled for the first time publicly. There was the midnight screening of Bruno Bozzetto's *Allegro Non Troppo;* so new that the Italian live-action had been neither dubbed into English nor subtitled (possibly to the advantage of those who previewed it that night). Bozzetto was on hand to talk about his film, and all of the film makers were accessible to talk about their work, and everyone talked animation excitedly and enthusiastically.

Thus, it was no wonder that the animation community was keyed up for another animation event when Ottawa '78 was announced as an ASIFA sponsored function, even in the same year as Zagreb '78.

From Furies *(top) by Sara Petty, and* Pencil Booklings *by Kathy Rose.*

But history cannot repeat itself. What was wonderful in 1976 isn't necessarily wonderful in 1978. Even before the start of the festival, it was obvious that Canada wasn't giving as much sponsorship—in terms of cold, hard cash—in '78. Invitations were sent to ASIFA members on the 1976 stationery. It was announced several weeks beforehand that the festival could not afford the workshop. What had been crucial to the first event in Ottawa was omitted from the second.

Fortunately, Co Hoedeman and ASIFA-Canada were still there. They set up a "cabaret" cum-theatre and called it "Chez-Ani." This became the very lifeblood of this year's festival. Filmmakers provided constant screenings of films not in the main festival; a bulletin board provided information; several nights of disco-dancing relaxed the festival-goers; and the space, itself, gave everyone a place to circulate, talk, have coffee, tea, or cookies, meet people and relax.

The films this year were, indeed, the main event. Some 500 films were entered into competition. The jury members (John Canemaker, Paul Dopf, Paul Driessen, Miroslaw

From Lady Fishbourne's Complete Guide to Table Manners *(top) by Janet Perlman, and* Martin the Cobbler *by Will Vinton.*

Kijowicz and Marv Newland) narrowed the selection to be screened down to 96. Of these only 12 would win awards and another six were to win special jury prizes for outstanding merit. There were six retrospective screenings; two late-night screenings, and a screening on award night of the festival winners. For most people, this certainly should have been enough animation to view. However, one of the retrospective screenings was a presentation of Disney's *Pinocchio*, making it questionable whether more of the competitive films couldn't have been shown to those who wanted to see them. Instead, they were offered a film that would be re-issued across the U.S. and Canada in a few months after the festival. Perhaps this one extra screening would have enabled a computer film to have been shown. Certainly, there must have been a few entered in the original 500 that would have been worth showing to the people who had travelled so far only to see what was new in animation.

Of the other retrospectives, there was the one dedicated to the films of Segundo de Chomon, an early Spanish animator who worked in a manner similar to that of Georges Melies. Louise Beaudet, head of the animation department of Cinematheque quebecoise, was responsible for this excellent presentation of the work of a forgotten artist. Beaudet was also responsible for the excellent retrospective of Otto Messmer and his Felix the Cat. For Ward Kimball's retrospective of "Disney In Space," we were given, aside from 50 minutes of fine animation Kimball directed for the *Disneyland* television series, a program of Jonathan Winters cavorting on *The Mouse Factory*. Certainly, most of those who went to this program felt cheated by this half hour of dated, routine television when they'd come to see *animation*.

The two late-night screenings included a program of historic commercials. The reel was first shown this year at Filmex in Los Angeles from predominantly California-produced films. The early ones were worth seeing again; the later ones were your typical animated TV spots. Half of them could have been eliminated (and almost were, with Ottawa's projectionist attempting to sabotage this program). There was also the premiere of *The Magic Flute*, a feature-length film produced for Italian television by Gianini and Luzzati. The animated sequences were beautifully designed and completely entertaining; the live action was every bit as bad as that in *Allegro Non Troppo*, despite the fact that *The Magic Flute* was in color.

There were 96 competing films. And certainly one would have had a difficult time gathering another 96 as fine as these to be grouped in one presentation. It is virtually impossible to do them justice in words alone. The program for the festival, for example, describes the film *La Traversee de L'atlantique a la Rame* as ". . . a colored cut-out technique [which] takes newlyweds on a treacherous voyage; she playing the harp and he, the flute. A special understatement and period design enhance the power of the mood." This is

fine for describing some of the visuals, but not the film itself. The two protagonists of this 23-minute film are not merely crossing the Atlantic, but they are crossing "life" itself—in a rowboat! It all sounds so simplistic and pretentious when described, that it seems ludicrous to those who haven't seen the film that this was named the grand prize winner of the festival—and deservedly so.

Sara Petty's *Furies* is described thus: "Studying at UCLA's animation department, Ms. Petty beautifully captures the movements and nuances of a pair of Siamese cats in art deco and moderne pastels." The film is literally poetry in motion (the description is a cliche, but the film isn't) as Futurist shapes swirl and jet across the screen perfectly describing the movements of two decidedly Siamese cats, who often are represented only through abstractions. It was the winner of the prize for a film shorter than three minutes.

Dick Williams' commercial *Jovan—The Power* is described as an "advertisement." Surely, this is the finest animated commercial to be done in the past few years; viewers can only sit spellbound. Williams' draftsmanship is undoubtedly the finest in animation's history, and it is probably best displayed in this "advertisement." It was obvious to everyone that no commercial would beat this for the best in the category.

It was nice to see George Griffin's *Viewmaster* win a prize. He is one of the few animation filmmakers who puts wit *and* depth into his films, consistently, yet his films are so rarely rewarded within the animation community. *Viewmaster* is an homage to Muybridge, the Phenakistoscope, and animation in general.

In summary, one must say that Ottawa '78 was certainly not Ottawa '76. It was still exciting, and it was inspiring to the animators who attended. Just to see those films made it all worthwhile. We can only hope that Ottawa '80 will be able to match Ottawa '78.

Michael Sporn works in animation in New York City.

The Ottawa jury (from left): Paul Dopf, Miroslaw Kijowicz, John Canemaker, Paul Driessen, and Marve Newland.

THE AWARD WINNERS — OTTAWA '78

Films longer than three minutes:	1. *Pencil Booklings* Kathy Rose, USA 2. *Satiemania* Zdenko Gasparovic, Yugoslavia
Films shorter than three minutes:	1. *Furies* Sara Petty, USA 2. *Viewmaster* George Griffin, USA
Promotional films and ads:	1. *Jovan — The Power* Richard Williams, Britain 2. *Underwater Kitty* Kurtz & Friends, USA
First films:	1. *Labyrinth* Shelley McIntosh, Canada 2. *Help, I'm Being Crushed to Death by a Black Rectangle* Carter Burwell, USA
Films for children:	1. *Martin the Cobbler* Will Vinton, USA 2. *Jorinde And Joringel* Nick Reus, Holland
Instructional films:	1. *Lady Fishbourne's Complete Guide To Better Table Manners* Janet Perlman, Canada 2. *Harness The Wind* Sidney Goldsmith, Canada
Special jury awards:	*Postanovka* Kenri Koulev, Bulgaria *The Metamorphosis of Mr. Samsa* Caroline Leaf, Canada *Rapid Eye Movements* Jeff Carpenter, USA *When I'm Rich* Ted Rockley, Stan Hayward & Derek Phillips, Britain *Why Me?* Janet Perlman & Derek Lamb, Canada The Sofia Studio in Bulgaria for their outstanding accomplishments in animation

Grand Prize for Best of the Festival: *La Traversee de L'Atlantique a la Rame* by Jean-Francoise Laguionie, France

Walt Disney at his Laugh-O-grams drawing board.

Up to Date in Kansas City

But Walt Disney Had Not Yet Gone As Far As He Could Go

BY DAVID R. SMITH

Kansas City, Missouri, was a bustling city in the late teens and early twenties and had passed 300,000 in population. The end of World War I had brought a rapid industrial expansion along with skyscrapers that had begun to change the city's skyline. As a major gateway to the west, Kansas City had developed into a national hub of transportation as well as an important industrial, commercial and financial center. But few people realize that at the same time it was experiencing this growth, Kansas City was also the home for a group of men who would eventually be the leaders in an unexpected field—that of motion picture animation. Foremost among this group was Walt Disney, but it also included such people as Ub Iwerks, Hugh Harman, Rudolf Ising, Carman Maxwell, Friz Freleng, Bugs Hardaway, Butch Davis, and Jimmy Lowerre. Though some animation was done in Kansas City, it would not be until all of these men moved to Hollywood that they would gain their fame and help to establish most of the major cartoon studios.

Coincidentally, with the exception of Harman and Ising,

all of these men got their start with the Kansas City Film Ad Service, which was under the capable direction of A. V. Cauger. Walt Disney would refer to Cauger in later years as the man "who gave me my first job in the movies."

Walt Disney's four years in Kansas City, after he returned from Red Cross service in France at the end of World War I. would end in bankruptcy, but they also would prepare him for establishing the Walt Disney Studio in Hollywood in 1923.

When Disney arrived in 1919 in Kansas City, where he had gone to school in earlier years, he knew that he wanted to do something in the field of art. The first opportunity which opened to him was as a commercial artist with the Pesmen-Rubin Commercial Art Studio. It was here that Disney met a fellow artist with the unlikely name of Ub Iwerks. When Pesmen-Rubin had to let the two artists go because of a lack of work, they briefly went into business for themselves as **Iwerks-Disney Commercial Artists. This partnership lasted** only a month, for in January 1920, Disney answered a newspaper ad and went to work for the Kansas City Slide Co. (later to be known as Kansas City Film Ad), and Iwerks joined him there two months later.

At the Film Ad company Disney worked on short films and slides for local theaters, including some stop-motion animation. But, he wanted to experiment with real animation. Several years later, he remembered this period:

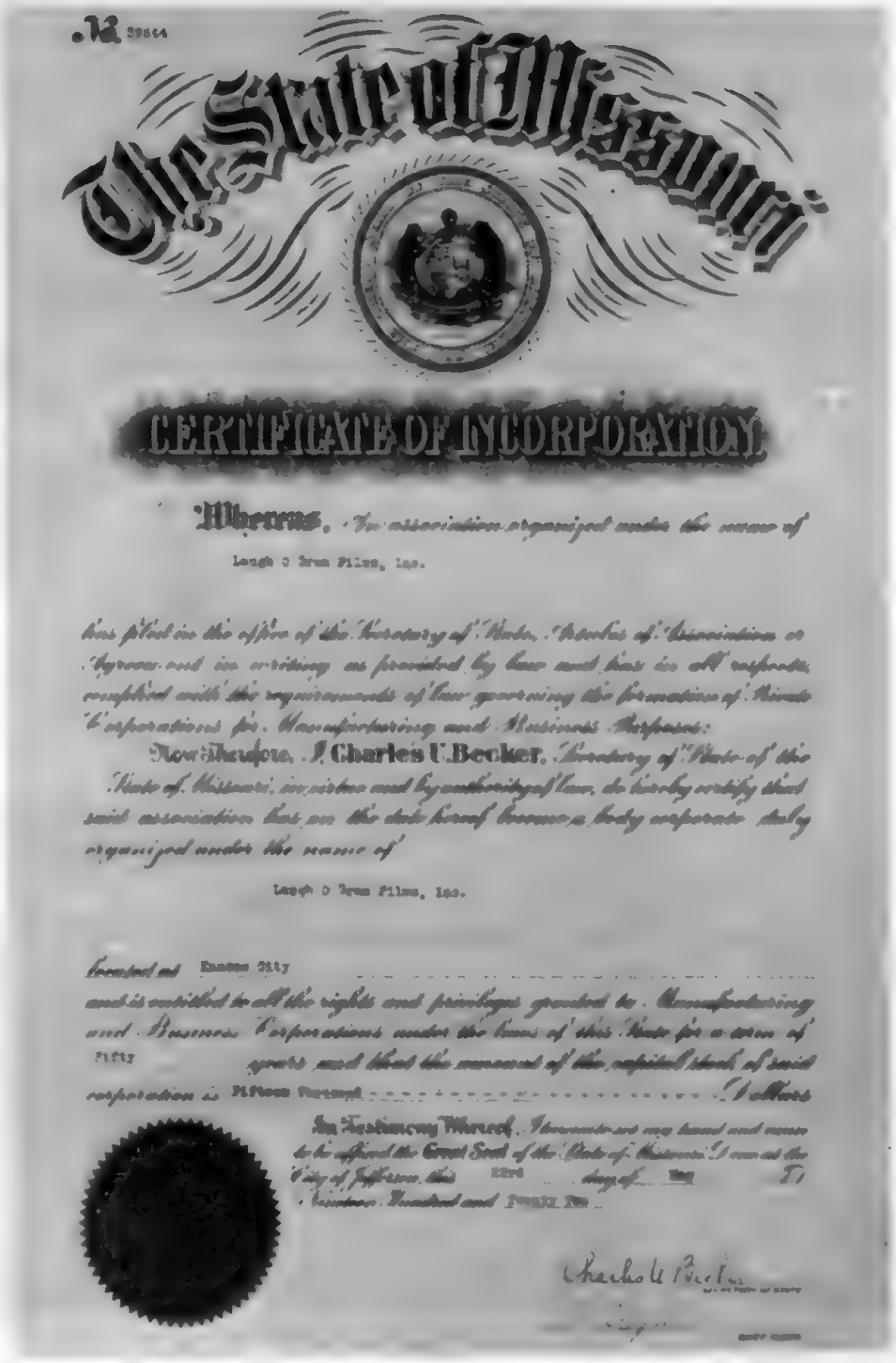
My home experimenting (in a garage in back of the Disney home at 3028 Bellefonntaine) led to the making of my first animated cartoon. It was a 200-foot film concerning various incidents in Kansas City. Mr. Cauger lent me an old camera to photograph it. I sold the film to Frank Newman, operator of the Newman Theater, for $60....The film created quite a little interest and I made a deal with Mr. Newman to make one film a week, cartooning local happenings. It is interesting to note I made those films at a total cost of less than 30¢ a foot.

The films were given the name of "Newman Laugh-O-grams."

Disney, wanting to make something with more substance than the short "Newman Laugh-O-grams," then decided to try his hand at animating fairy tales. So, he enlarged the garage studio and persuaded a few young prospective cartoonists to help him make *Little Red Riding Hood,* promising them a job if the film was a success. Financing for the film came from Disney's salary at the Film Ad company.

For six months, Disney and his friends spent their nights and spare time working on *Little Red Riding Hood.* When that film was completed, work began immediately on a second fairy tale, *The Four Musicians of Bremen,* along with a number of "Lafflets," which were 300 feet in length and combined both cartoon and joke material.

As were the others in the series, *The Four Musicians of Bremen* was a modernized version of an old folk tale. In the Disney version, the four musicians (a cat, a dog, a donkey, and a chicken), are blamed for everything that goes wrong


The State of Missouri

CERTIFICATE OF INCORPORATION

Whereas, The association organized under the name of

Laugh O Gram Films, Inc.

has filed in the office of the Secretary of State, Articles of Association as by law required, and has in all respects complied with the requirements of law governing the formation of Private Corporations for Manufacturing and Business Purposes:

Now, therefore, I, Charles U. Becker, Secretary of State of the State of Missouri, by virtue and by authority of law, do hereby certify that said association has on this date become a body corporate duly organized under the name of

Laugh O Gram Films, Inc.

Laugh-O-grams' certificate of incorporation.

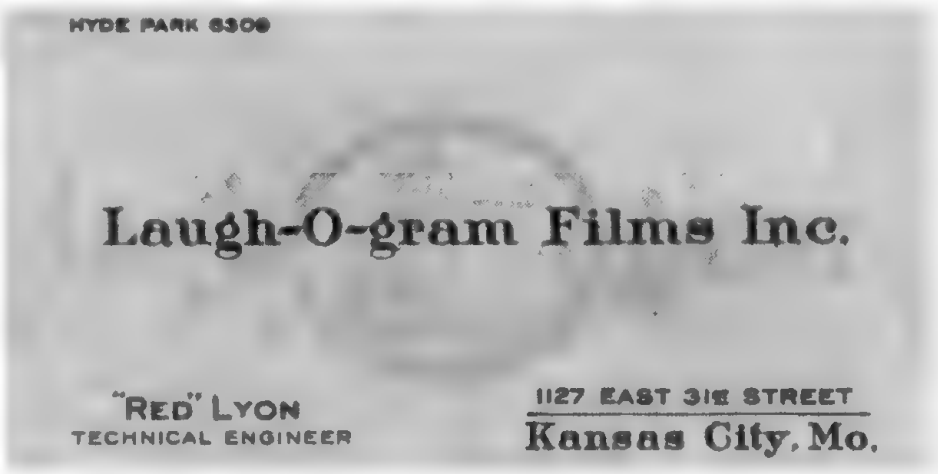
and are chased out of town. They stop to rest by a pond, and discover that they are hungry. The cat has an idea. They play their instruments, and a fish comes out of the water to dance to the music. The cat tries to catch him, but has to follow him into the pond where he is in turn pursued by a swordfish. The swordfish chases the cat out of the water and with his companions into a tree at the edge of a cliff. The swordfish saws down the tree and the four musicians fall through a chimney into a house full of robbers. The robbers exit and attack the house with cannonballs. The musicians fight back, with the cat riding on one of the cannonballs and beating up the robbers with his tail. He falls off and loses his nine lives but manages to grab the last one before it gets away, and the four musicians live happily ever after.

In the spring of 1922, Disney quit his job and decided to start a company. The Articles of Association for the company, to be called Laugh-O-gram Films, Inc., were drawn up on May 18, 1922, and the Certificate of Incorporation was issued by the Missouri Secretary of State on May 23. The company was capitalized at $15,000, which was divided into 300 shares of stock of par value $50 each. At the time of incorporation, 51 per cent of the stock issue was subscribed, giving the company assets of $7,700—$2,000 in

Fred Harman, Walt Disney, and Red Lyon at Kansas City Film Ad.

cash and $5,000 in property. The "property" list included a "hand motor drive automatic camera stand, including camera, Cooper-Hewitt lights, automatic dissolve and vignette, with foot control frame," along with the films that had already been completed. The Board of Directors consisted of Walter E. Disney (70 shares), William W. Lyon (30 shares), Fletcher Hammond (10 shares), W.F. Hammond (40 shares), and Edmund J. Wolf (4 shares). Lyon became the cameraman (his calling card read "technical engineer") for Laugh-O-grams; Wolf and the two Hammonds received stock and places on the Board in return for supplying the company with furnishings and material needed to begin operations.

Laugh-O-grams had outgrown the space in Disney's garage, so offices and studio were set up on the second floor of a building at 1127 E. 31st Street, at the corner of Forest. Other occupants of the building included a drug store, the LeMorris photo studio, a laundry, and the Forest Inn Cafe, whose Greek owner Jerry Raggos would later help his upstairs neighbors when the going got tough. Laugh-O-grams had four offices: one for the office manager, one for the secretary, one for Walt Disney and the artists, and one for the camera. Bit by bit, a staff was put together. The *Kansas City Post* ran ads which read,"Male Help Wanted, Scenario writer for permanent position. Apply in person or write; submit samples" or "Girls wanted—with artistic ability for mounting pictures, cartooning." Joining Walt Disney as animators were Hugh Harman, Rudolf Ising, Carman "Max" Maxwell, Ub Iwerks, Lorey Tague, and Otto Walliman. Adolph Kloepper was hired as the business manager. Other staff members included Leslie Mace as salesman, Aletha Reynolds as inker and painter, William "Red" Lyon as cameraman, and Nadine Simpson as bookkeeper and cashier. Walt Pfeiffer, a childhood pal of Walt Disney, joined the staff with the title of "scenario editor." Sample salaries included $50 a week to Iwerks and Kloepper, $25 to Harman and Ising, and $15 to Maxwell.



Enthusiasm for the new company was high. Staff members accepted minimal salaries, with which they promptly turned around and bought Laugh-O-gram stock. Everyone was young—Walt Disney was only 20 years old and Ub Iwerks was only 21. It was not all work and no play. After the purchase of a used tripod for $50, a fake camera was mounted upon it and the staff gathered on the roof of the studio building to take some gag pictures. Other times the gang and some friends would take the camera to Swope Park, one of the largest city parks in the country, where they would pose in outlandish positions.

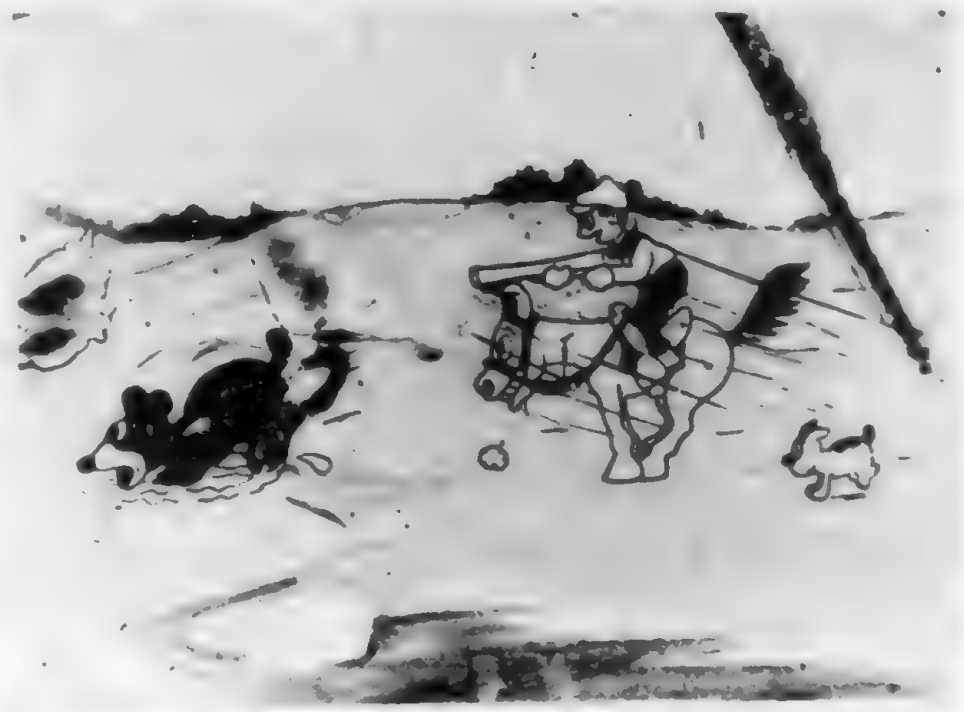
Hope ran high that the series of "Laugh-O-grams" could be sold for a high price. The first announcement, placed in *Motion Picture News* on July 15, 1922, proclaimed, "Announcing a series of Twelve Laugh-O-grams, 'all that the name implies'; Full particulars regarding plans for distribution and release dates will be announced soon." The number 12 turned out to be an exaggeration.

Jack and the Beanstalk was the third subject to be completed. Leslie Mace was sent to New York to try to arrange distribution. He stayed at the McGalpin Hotel, and before long the hotel bills were amounting to more money than the amount of money the company had in the bank. Eventually Disney told him to return to Kansas City.

But Mace had made some contacts with a Mr. Kelley, who was the representative of an organization known as Pictorial Clubs of Tennessee. Pictorial Clubs was involved in the distribution of films in the non-theatrical field, exclusively to schools and churches. Finally a contract was signed on September 16, 1922. It called for six Laugh-O-grams at a price of $11,100. One hundred dollars was paid, with the balance not to be due until January 1, 1924. This 15-month period would be the downfall of Laugh-O-gram Films. No money was coming in, and the company began to fall on hard times.

On October 7, Red Lyon wrote to his mother with some inklings of trouble, but still with grandiose hopes for the future. He mentioned that Laugh-O-grams was $5,000 in the hole, and that they would need "another five thousand to put the place over, and additional fifty or hundred thousand to put in a real production plant next spring." He explained that the company had originally capitalized for only enough to make four pictures in their series, but the contract which Mace had signed called for six. The fourth, *Goldie Locks and the Three Bears*, had been finished, *Puss in Boots* was nearly done, and the script was ready on *Cinderella*, which would complete the series. He closed by saying, "I am going to sit tight. I have the greatest opportunity I have ever had and I'm in for everything but my false teeth."

Things must have gotten much worse in a short time, for a week later when Red Lyon again wrote his mother, his tune had changed. After mentioning that the company was "worse than broke" and going into the hole "about four hundred more each week," he admitted, "I am going to try and sell my stock—loan the money to the company and possibly quit and get something more sure." He complained that they could make a go of it if only they could obtain the necessary cash.



Two frames from Laugh-O-grams cartoons.

With no money coming in from Pictorial Clubs, Laugh-O-gram Films had to find a way to raise cash. An article which appeared in the *Kansas City Star* on October 29, 1922, indicates one source which was tapped for funds:

Recording the Baby's Life in Films

The Laugh-O-gram Films Co., Inc., 1127 E. 31st St., has added the feature of photographing youngsters to its regular business of making animated cartoons. An admiring parent wishing to preserve the native graces of his progeny's actions notifies "Red Lyon," cinematographer, and "Walt" Disney, president of the Corporation and head cartoonist for the animated cartoons. Then comes the stalking of the baby....The company furnishes a projector service with its filming, which provides that a private showing be made in the home—three showings for each 100 feet of film...."In the future, projectors will be as common as phonographs are now," Lyon said, "and there will be no need to furnish private showings, as everyone will have one in his own home."

The baby films brought in a little much-needed cash, but not enough. More was needed, and Disney knew that he had to find an "angel."

The backer whom he found was Dr. J. V. Cowles, a retired

Above, the Laugh-O-grams office. At left, Dr. J. V. Cowles

Kansas City physician and investor. Dr. Cowles advanced $2,500 cash on November 30, 1922. The money was used to help pay off some of the mounting bills for rent, utilities, and supplies. Adolph Kloepper later remembered:

One day, when Walt and I went down to Dr. Cowles' office, on Grant Avenue in Kansas City at that time, to pick up the Friday payroll, we left Dr. Cowles office and headed back to the studio on 31st and as we got to an intersection and just as we were ready to step off the curb, I think we both looked down at the same time and here was a dollar bill lying in the gutter. I think we both made a grab for it, but I got the dollar bill. And I held it up and I said, "Walt, we're going to have lunch." And we did, on the dollar bill. Because at that time I question whether we had a dollar between us.

The money from Dr. Cowles could not solve all of the company's problems. Disney used to tell the story that in December, Dr. Thomas B. McCrum, a local dentist, telephoned him to ask him to do an educational film on dental care. When Dr. McCrum asked Disney to come to his

Above, advertising Laugh-O-grams in a parade of the South Central Business Association. Walt Disney is seated in the back seat, Leslie Mace has his foot on the running board, and Rudolf Ising is behind the car. At right, Adolph Kloepper and Ising in the Laugh-O-grams office.

office to draw up the agreements, Disney had to refuse, as he had left his only pair of shoes to be repaired and did not have the $1.50 needed to redeem them. Dr. McCrum came over to the Laugh-O-gram office, paid the $1.50 for Disney, then worked out an agreement to pay him $500 for the film.

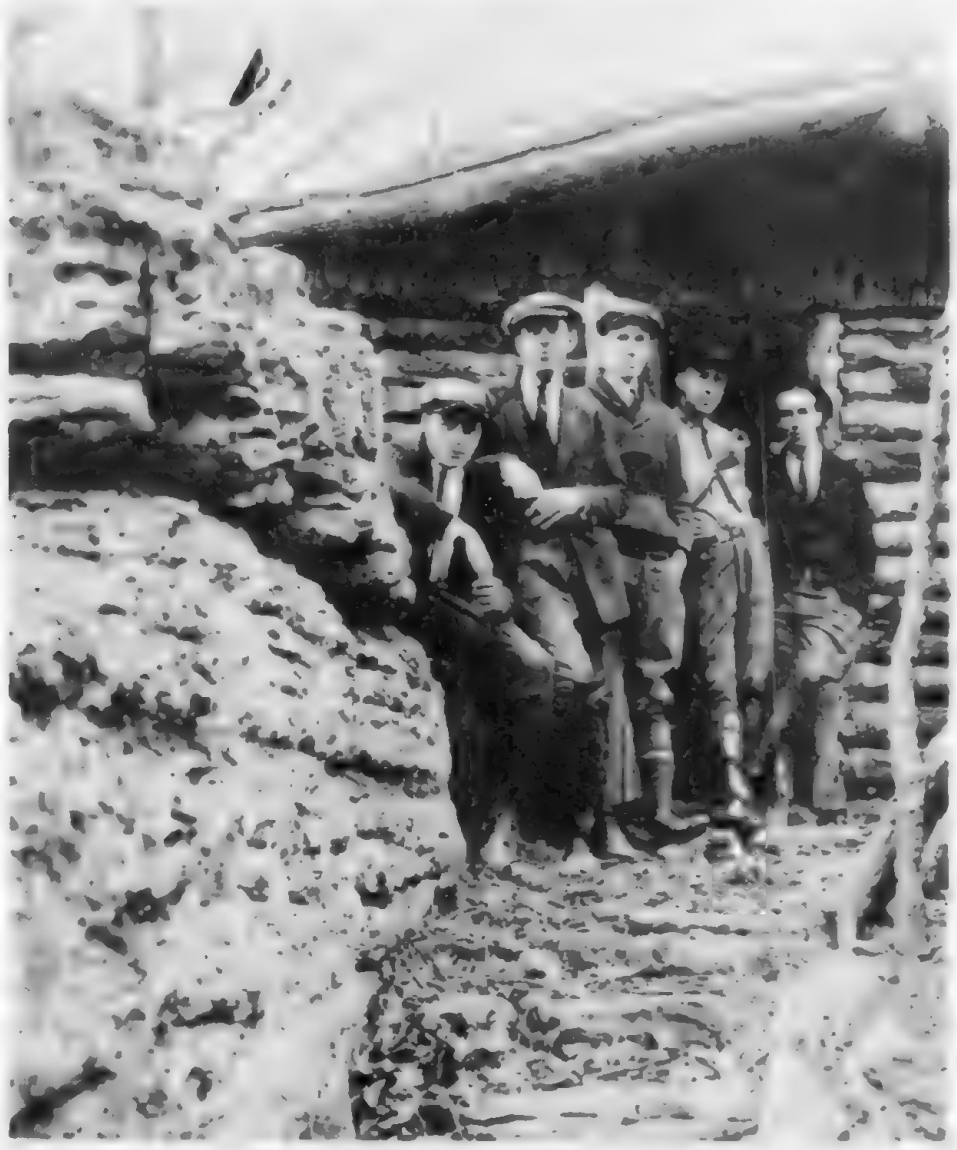
The film, *Tommy Tucker's Tooth,* deals with the home and school life of two boys--Tommy Tucker, who takes pride in himself and very good care of his teeth, and Jimmie Jones, who is careless about his appearance and with his teeth. When the boys apply for a job, Tommy gets it because of his personal appearance. Jimmie realizes his mistake, and, by taking care of his teeth and improving his appearance, is able to return later and obtain another job. *Tommy Tucker's Tooth* is almost completely live action, with a few animated inserts of tooth decay demons.

In 1971 the Disney Archives discovered the existence of a print of this film, located in the basement of the American

continued on page 30

CAFE

THE
FOUNTAIN
OF YOUTH



Above left, the building at 31st and Forest Streets in Kansas Dity where Laugh-O-grams had its offices on the second floor, at the far right. On the corner is the Forest Inn Cafe, owned by Jerry and Louis Raggos; the cafe extended credit to the hungry Laugh-O-grams artists. The gag photo at top right may have been taken on the roof of this building. Walt Disney is brandishing a pistol over Carman Maxwell; Ub Iwerks is holding the director's megaphone, and Adolph Kloepper is behind the camera. Other gag photos were taken in Swope Park in Kansas City. In "The Fountain of Youth," at left, Disney is at the pump, giving Iwerks a drink; the others are, from left, Rudolf Ising, Bob Hough, and Carman Maxwell. In the photo at right (titled "Gang at Buzzard's Roost") are (from left) Ising, Hough, Maxwell, Iwerks, and Disney. All four of these photos are from the collection of Carman Maxwell.

Above, shooting the Song-o-reel Martha. *Walt Disney is in the director's chair, Rudolf Ising is on the stool, Walt Pfeiffer is kneeling in the background, and Red Lyon is behind the camera.*

continued from page 27

Below, the title card for Martha.

Dental Association in Chicago. A press release was sent out and the resulting articles carried by the wire services brought some unexpected results.

The Archives received a letter from Dr. John W. Records, an Oklahoma City obstetrician. As an 11-year-old sixth grade student at Benton Grammar School, Jack Records had played the role of Jimmie Jones in the film. He recalled:

The cast was chosen from several schools. Walt Disney came to our school to interview a group of children who had been pre-selected by teachers. it took several weeks to complete the film since the filming was done during school hours only once or twice weekly. I remember distinctly going to Walt's office once or twice where two men were at work on the animation over the big ground glass drawing table lighted from beneath. Walt Disney knew exactly at each filming what he wanted us to do and how we were to do it. There was no fooling around, but we all liked him immediately. Everything went smoothly due to his easy way of directing us. He called me into his office when we were finished with the film and gave me a substantial reward (either a five or ten dollar bill) for my cooperation.

Walt Disney, Adolph Kloepper, and Ub Iwerks filming Martha.

By November 1922, Laugh-O-grams was no longer able to pay its salaries. Dr. Cowles' loans had helped keep away the creditors but did little to help compensate the long-suffering staff. Hopes began to die. Lorey Tague resigned in January 1923, and the other artists wondered how long they could remain without being paid. Always on the horizon, however, was that $11,000 that was due to come from Pictorial Clubs in 1924. Disney managed to bring in a few dollars occasionally by utilizing the studio camera as Kansas City correspondent for Pathe, Selznick, and Universal newsreels and photographing conventions and other noteworthy events. But more funds were needed.

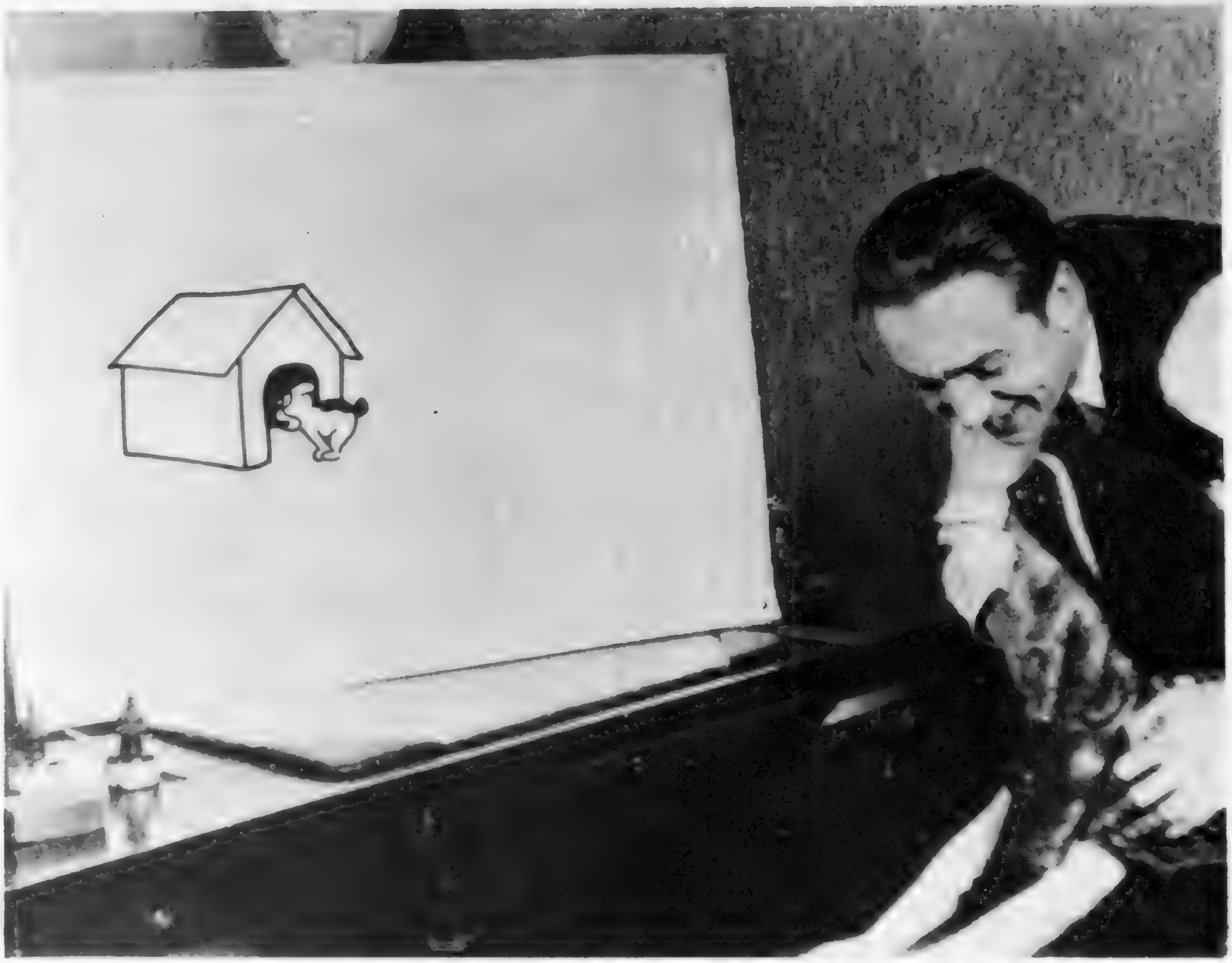
In February 1923, a businessman, Fred Schmeltz, advanced the company $506.76 and on March 17, 1923, the stockholders met and decided to increase the capital stock from $15,000 to $50,000. Listed were assets of $20,000 (including the $11,000 contract, the finished films, and $2,000 cash from Dr. Cowles) and liabilities of $8,000. 700 new shares were divided evenly between Walt Disney and Dr. Cowles. Even though he knew of the insolvent condition of the company, Fred Schmeltz advanced additional funds in April, May, and June, totalling over $1,500, with these loans being secured by practically all of the assets of the company, **including the Pictorial Clubs contract.**

Laugh-O-grams was still attempting to sell its films. In March, Kloepper wrote to Universal, sending a sample "Lafflets" reel: "You will note that two of these reels are cartoon material and the other is clay modelling. In the series we will also introduce cartoons and live characters acting together in some productions. This will give you three separate and distinct types which can be released alternately. We are going to make arrangements for the distribution of this series very soon." The Lafflets included such titles as *Golf in Slow Motion, Esthetic Camping, Reuben's Big Day, The Woodland Potter,* and *A Pirate for a Day.* A letter a week later mentioned, "within a very short time we will have several of these subjects available. [They] will be ideal to link with a screen magazine or any other short reel." This correspondence gives the first indication that Laugh-O-grams was considering going into the field of combining live action with animation, the field that would eventually bring Walt Disney his first success.

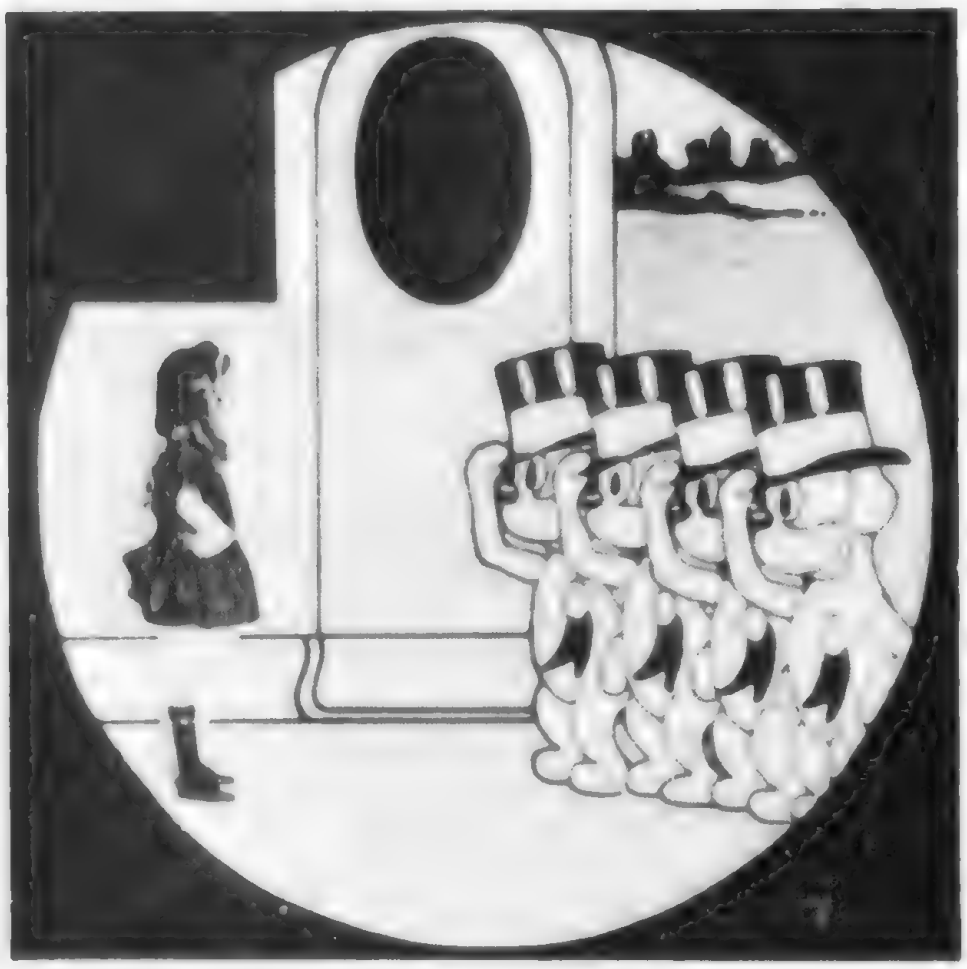
In May 1923, Walt Disney wrote to several prospective distributors, exclaiming:

We have just discovered something new and clever in animated cartoons!

The first subject of this distinctly different series is now in



Above, Walt Disney and Virginia Davis in Alice's Wonderland. *Below, Virginia Davis is welcomed to Cartoonland.*



production, and will require a few more weeks for completion. It is a new idea that will appeal to all classes and is bound to be a winner, because it is a clever combination of live characters and cartoons, not like "Out of the Inkwell" or Earl Hurd's, but of an entirely different nature, using a cast of live child actors who carry on their action on cartoon scenes with cartoon characters.

These new subjects will be a full reel in length, and can be released at regular intervals of two weeks or a month.

Disney went on to suggest that the distributors screen some of the earlier Laugh-O-gram subjects, which they could get from Pictorial Clubs.

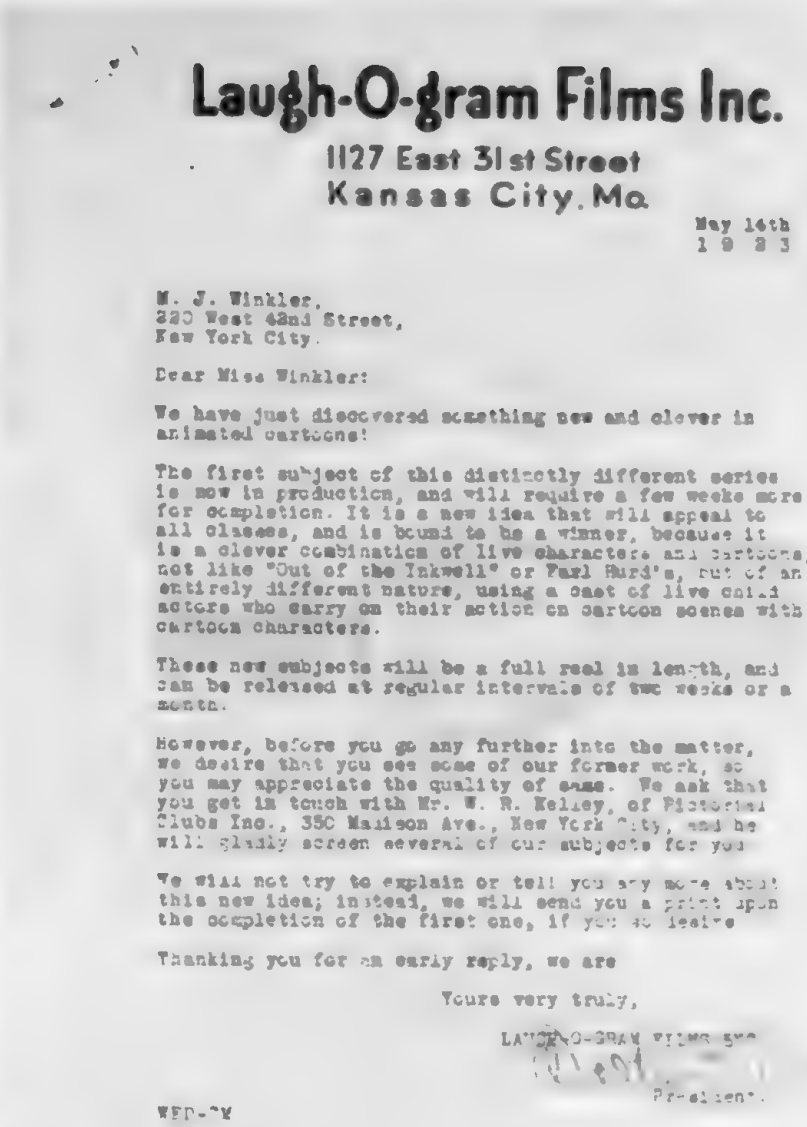
A curly-haired young girl named Virginia Davis was chosen to act in the film, which also featured Walt Disney, Ub Iwerks, Hugh Harman, Rudolf Ising, and several of the other artists in the cast. The film was titled *Alice's Wonderland*, and told the story of a little girl visiting an animation studio and saying she wanted to watch the animators "draw some funnies." She is shown some animated antics of a cat and dog on a drawing board. When she goes home and to bed, she dreams that she takes the train to Cartoonland. There she is greeted by the cartoon animals, participates in a parade, does a dance, and is chased by lions who escape from a zoo.

Alice's Wonderland was an inexpensive film to produce, but the Laugh-O-grams staff scrimped and saved in order to put every penny they could raise into it. One way to save money was to move to cheaper quarters, so in June, Laugh-O-grams moved to offices on the second floor of the Wirthman Building at 3239-41 Troost Avenue. Walt Disney had to write the distributors who had replied to his May letter, "Owing to the numerous delays and backsets we have encountered in moving to our new studio, we will not be able to complete the first picture of our series by the time we expected." He explained that it would be finished very soon, and that he expected to be in New York around the first of July with a print and an outline of the studio's future program.

That trip to New York was not to be. Conditions at Laugh-O-grams got even worse. The staff labored to finish *Alice's Wonderland,* their last hope. Hugh Harman recalls that he and Disney worked to print the film themselves that summer, and it was so hot that the emulsion ran. Roy Disney was helping his brother with rent and sandwich money during these difficult times. Bookkeeper Nadine Missakian would occasionally type menus for the cafe downstairs in exchange for free hot lunches for Disney and others in the firm. Disney had difficulty meeting his $3-a-week room rent, so he moved a cot into the studio and was able to save some money. Kloepper recalled, "During those lean times, I never once heard Walt say anything that would sound like defeat. He was always optimistic about his ability and about the value of his ideas and about the possiblities of cartoons in the entertainment field. Never once did I hear him express anything except determination to go ahead, because he believed in himself and he believed in what he was trying to accomplish."

A final thought occured to Disney and the Laugh-O-gram staff. Perhaps they could make some money by illustrating popular songs on film. Disney contacted the Jenkins Music Company in Kansas City, and they agreed to contract for a single film that would then be projected at the Isis Theater while the song was sung from the stage. The song chosen for this "song-o-reel" was "Martha; Just a Plain Old Fashioned Name," by Joe L. Sanders, which Jenkins had published in 1922. Nadine Missakian recalls, "Kansas City locations were chosen for the sets and Disney and his crew roamed the city to find the proper atmosphere--homes, parks, wooded places in the suburbs, Troost Lake, the old Watts Mill."

From April to the end of June 1923, the Laugh-O-gram staff drifted off. The final blow to Laugh-O-grams was the inability of Pictorial Clubs to pay their debt. All of the assets of Pictorial Clubs of Tennessee had been sold to Pictorial Clubs of New York, who assumed none of the liabilities. As Disney recalled, "I tried my best to salvage something out of the company and to obtain new financing so I could remain in Kansas City, but I wasn't successful. I spent a number of weeks working on a plan to make a weekly newsreel for the *Kansas City Post,* but that deal fell through, too. That seemed to wash up all prospects in Kansas City, so I decided to go to Hollywood." Schmeltz came through with $550 to pay the rent on July 20, 1923, but the end of the Laugh-O-grams company was at hand. Late in July, Disney packed up his few belongings in a battered suitcase and caught the train for Hollywood.



Laugh-O-gram Films Inc.
1127 East 31st Street
Kansas City, Mo.

May 14th
1 9 2 3

M. J. Winkler,
320 West 42nd Street,
New York City.

Dear Miss Winkler:

We have just discovered something new and clever in animated cartoons!

The first subject of this distinctly different series is now in production, and will require a few weeks more for completion. It is a new idea that will appeal to all classes, and is bound to be a winner, because it is a clever combination of live characters and cartoons, not like "Out of the Inkwell" or Paul Hurd's, but of an entirely different nature, using a cast of live child actors who carry on their action on cartoon scenes with cartoon characters.

These new subjects will be a full reel in length, and can be released at regular intervals of two weeks or a month.

However, before you go any further into the matter, we desire that you see some of our former work, so you may appreciate the quality of same. We ask that you get in touch with Mr. W. R. Kelley, of Pictorial Clubs Inc., 350 Madison Ave., New York City, and he will gladly screen several of our subjects for you

We will not try to explain or tell you any more about this new idea; instead, we will send you a print upon the completion of the first one, if you so desire

Thanking you for an early reply, we are

Yours very truly,

LAUGH-O-GRAM FILMS INC.

President.

WED-W

Walt Disney had nothing more to do with Laugh-O-gram Films. The company's remaining employees filed for bankruptcy on October 4, 1923, in the United States District Court for the Western District of Missouri. The employees met on October 16, 1923 (coincidentally the very date that Walt Disney Productions was formed in Hollywood) to list the salaries due them. Walt Disney did not file a claim for his back salary, so he played no part in the bankruptcy action. The largest amount owed was $1,003 to Ub Iwerks. Harman claimed $555, Kloepper $513, and Ising $711, with smaller amounts to the others. Dr. Cowles agreed to act as trustee, without salary or compensation. A December meeting of all creditors, however, elected Joseph M. Jones as trustee, and he hired a legal firm to secure payment on the note from Pictorial Clubs. The total claims, including salaries, on the books of the company in November 1923, amounted to $12,325.23.

Harman, Ising, and Maxwell started their own studio, called Arabian Nights, and purchased from the bankrupt company two animating booths, one punch, one camera and stand, one re-wind table, one copy-o-graph, one inking table, one steel cabinet, and two chairs for $302 at a rate of $40 a

Courtesy of Carman Maxwell

This reunion of Kansas City Film Ad staffers was held on December 28, 1944, at the Roosevelt Hotel in Los Angeles. Standing left to right are Dick Clinton, Friz Freleng (the Warner cartoon director), Ub Iwerks, unidentified, George W. Miller, Lawrence Goble, James H. Craig, unidentified (bending over), J. B. "Bugs" Hardaway (a story man at the Schlesinger and Lantz studios), unidentified, and Melvin "Tubby" Millar, (also a story man at Hollywood cartoon studios). Seated are Lottie Clinton, Walt Disney, Mrs. A. V. Cauger, A. V. Cauger, and an unidentified woman who may be the Caugers' daughter. Most of the identifications are by Carman Maxwell, who was long associated with the Harman-Ising and MGM cartoon studios.

month. This money was paid to Schmeltz, but he was later ordered by the court to pay it to the trustee for the benefit of all the creditors.

Eventually, in January 1924, a new contract was drawn up with Pictorial Clubs of New York, by which they received all of the Laugh-O-gram films and the right to use the name "Laugh-O-grams" for the sum of $12,000. The contract listed the six Laugh-O-grams, plus *Alice's Wonderland* (Disney had been able to use this as a "pilot" film to sell his series, but was unable to include it as part of the series), and eight Lafflets. *Tommy Tucker's Tooth* was not part of the assets of the company, for it belonged to Dr. McCrum. Over the next two and a half years, Pictorial Clubs paid off its debt, and the creditors of the bankrupt company eventually received 45.303¢ on the dollar for their claims. The case was finally closed on December 28, 1927. The Laugh-O-gram films were never copyrighted, nor was their distribution wide. By October 1929, they had been acquired by Bollman and Grant, who gave them the demeaning title of "Whoopee Sketches." Today, no prints are known of *Little Red Riding Hood, Jack and the Beanstalk, Goldie Locks and the Three Bears, Martha,* or any of the Lafflets.

Walt Disney's almost four years in Kansas City did not lead him to any great successes, but they did give him much-needed experience in running an animation studio. From *Alice's Wonderland* came a lengthy series of Alice comedies (56 in three and a half years) which would bring the first semblance of fame to the Disney studio. Also, from the Kansas City experience came many of the first staff members for the new studio—Harman, Ising, Maxwell, Iwerks. A frequently quoted statement of Disney's was that one should always have a good failure when one is young. Laugh-O-gram Films, Inc. was certainly a failure, but it started Walt Disney along the paths which would eventually lead him to the pinnacle of success in the field of animation.

David R. Smith is the archivist for Walt Disney Productions. His article on the life of Ub Iwerks appeared in Funnyworld *No. 14.*

Except as noted, all illustrations for this article are courtesy of the Walt Disney Archives.

HUEMERESQUE

A Column
By Dick Huemer

Dick Huemer worked in animation studios for more than 50 years, starting at Raoul Barre's "Mutt and Jeff" studio in 1916. He later was story director for such Disney features as Fantasia *and* Dumbo. *In this column, he recalls one of the most famous—or notorious—figures of animation's early days.*

As Uncle Remus might have said about Charlie Bowers, "He was de mos' *bodacious* crittur." But bodacious or not, he was also one of the cleverest cartoonists that ever stooped to enter our then rather looked-down-upon animation profession. When I first saw the collection of his editorial cartoons for the *Newark News*, I drooled with envy. That such manipulation of pen and ink could be! And talk about his "Uncle Sam," without whose competent limning scarcely any editorial cartoonist of the day could hope to exist, well—! Charlie's "Uncle Sam's" were right up there with the best. Then, too, he had done a series of extraordinarily brilliant commercial cartoons for a now defunct (I guess) beer called P.O.N., or Pride of Newark. I don't know how proud Newark was of that beer but they certainly should have been proud of Bowers' keen drawings. Great big things, they were, in the original. I have often wondered what became of them.

His contribution to the animation scene of the period was equally outstanding. For a while he operated a branch of the "Mutt and Jeff" studio out of town, in Mount Vernon. He had his own staff—only Carl Meyer comes to mind as one of his animators. Bowers animated too, I believe, as well as writing all the stories and gags, and we all thought his were the best of the cartoon shorts. Yet they might all have been dropped down a deep black hole for all that anybody outside the studio saw or remarked about them.

The Library of Congress

Charlie (or Charley) Bowers, in addition to his many years as a cartoonist for newspapers and animated films, had a brief fling as a screen comedian, in a short-lived series called "Bowers Comedies." This is the cover of the press sheet for one of them, from 1928.

Well, there you have some of the Mr. Hyde side of Charlie Bowers. The bodacity which kind of marred his image, and yet made him so colorful, is to me more interesting. There must be plenty of Bowers stories still around. Here are a few of them.

I don't think anyone ever abhorred the truth as much as he did. I do believe that the gaudy falsification of almost any subject afforded him more pleasure than the bald truth. In extenuation I must add that most of the time he probably did it just to be entertaining. He was also a great mimic and could probably have been quite a successful actor. Indeed, he looked like one. He was what you might have seen stepping out of a stage door, with his hat sitting at a jaunty angle atop his curly hair.

Once, we were having trouble with the portable oil heaters with which we tried so vainly to heat the great "Mutt and Jeff" barn during a hard winter. Right away, Bowers came up with a fantastic tale of how he had once walked a tightrope between two buildings in Chicago, carrying a lighted oil stove in each hand! I looked intently for the tongue in his cheek, but it wasn't there. I

think he really believed that silly story himself!

I particularly like the yarn about when he was a small boy. Don't ask me what he was doing in a covered wagon crossing the western plains on its way to Lord knows where. Nor do not ask me how it came about that he fell off said wagon—or rather fell UNDER it. And that heavily loaded wagon, with its huge iron-shod wheels, *rolled right over poor little Charlie's body.* Was our little hero hurt? Cut in half? Miserably mashed? Well, you won't hardly believe this (neither did I) but right at the time he fell off, the wagon just happened to be crossing a very sandy desert and when the horrified parents rushed back to collect their poor child's severed body, they beheld a miracle! You see, the sand was so soft that the wheels had merely pressed their broth of a boy deep down into the sand, passing harmlessly over him. And when he stood up, smiling and unhurt, there in the sand of the desert was a perfectly formed impression of his little body—from head to toe. WOW!

The Lord only knows about all our bodacious friend's financial peccadillos. His bilking of Raoul Barre is common knowledge. Only one other incident comes to mind after lo! these many years. It seems Charlie had inveigled some poor sucker into investing money in the studio. This was after he had aced Barre out and consequently he had a free hand. And did he play it! Naturally the sucker, let's call him Herr Braun (he was of German origin and during World War I this was a rather dangerous thing to be in the U.S.), not receiving any return from his investment concluded he had fallen into the hands of a confidence man (which indeed he had). He stormed into Bowers' office, purple with rage, demanded an accounting, pounding on the table and threatening Bowers with legal action. Had he been bigger and less flabby, he would surely have threatened instant mayhem. In his wrath he snatched a blotter from the desk and with sundry imprecations, threw it on the floor where it landed topside up.

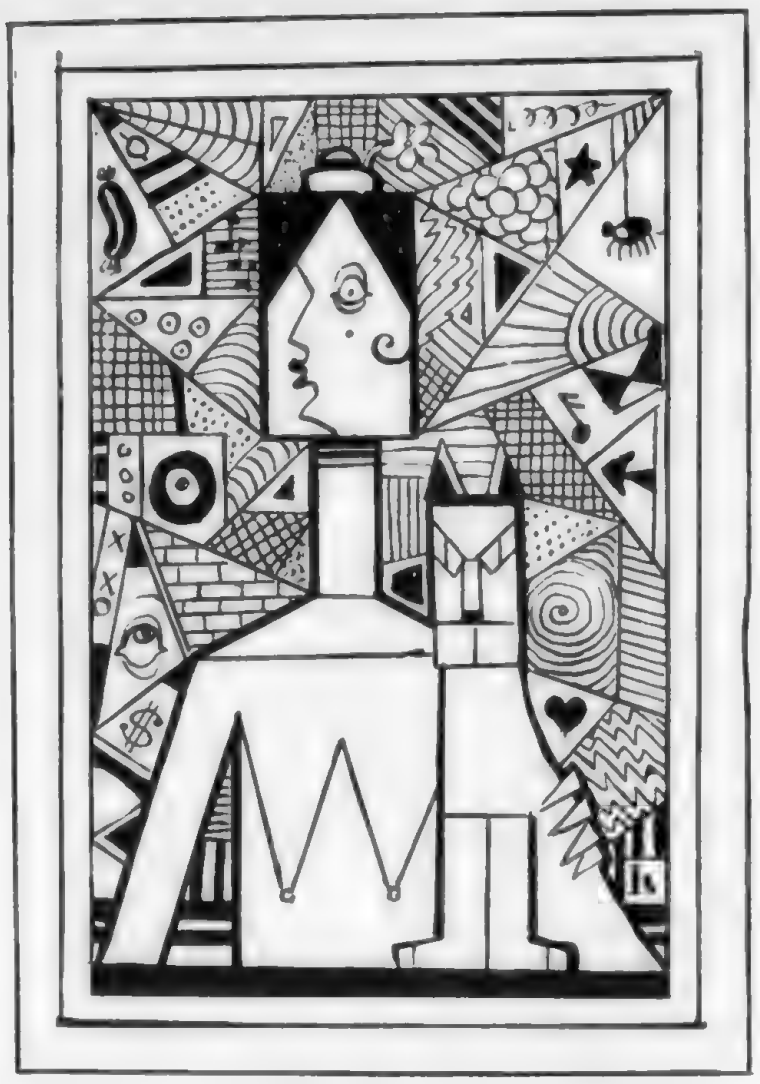
So there lay the blotter. Behind the desk cowered a somewhat chastened but far from resourceless Charlie. Suddenly he sprang to his feet, pointing to the blotter lying picture side up on the floor at his feet.

"Mr. Braun," he said coldly, "do you realize what you have just done?"

Momentarily thrown off his stride, the poor bilkee obediently looked down. Displayed prominently on the blotter was a large colored picture of the American flag. Bowers gave him no time to speak. He pounced.

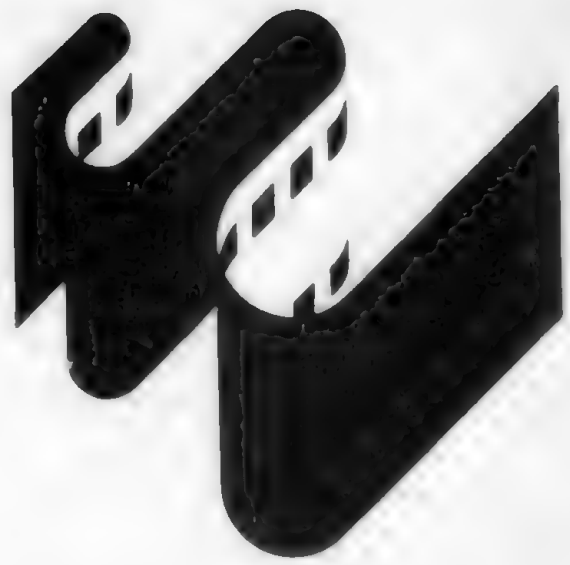
"You, sir," he said in his best Edwin Booth manner, "have desecrated the American flag! I will have nothing to do with anyone who perpetrates such an un-American act. I demand that you pick up Old Glory immediately, before I inform the proper authorities of your shameful act."

Exit Mr. Braun quietly and permanently.



Simplicity is Art

He racked his brain to find a name
That would not be too trite or tame
He tried to think of something new
And thumbed through Bartletts for a clue
He scorned to call it, "Feline Friends"
He spurned "The Woman Condescends."
To "Femme et Chat" he sneered, and how!
Nor would he harbor, "Katz Und Frau."
It seemed no thoughts went far enough
And so he named it, "Girl With Cat"
And wisely let it go at that.



ANIMATION at Filmex 78

By STEVEN PAUL LEIVA

Animation has never had any trouble being loved. But love has come to it as love comes to a warm puppy: automatically and unthinking. Most people see in animation only the equivalent of big, brown liquid eyes, and a playful sense of fun; then they pass it off, as they pet the dog, scratch it behind the ears, and scoot it on its way, while turning to more serious matters.

It is respect, not love, that animation lacks. Respect on several levels: as a potential money making entertainment, as an exacting, demanding craft, and as an art form that can excite us, stretch us, show us things, worlds, feelings--distilled to their essences--as we have rarely been shown them before. Respect is not easy to come by, a complex matter of earning it, most people say. But earning respect is animation's problem in only one of the three areas mentioned, as a money-making entertainment. In the next several years if Ralph Bakshi's *Lord of the Rings* or Richard Williams' *The Thief and the Cobbler* has its boxoffice receipts reported by *Variety* as "nifty," "tidy," "neat," "sweet," and "boffo," then respect for animation will be immediate. And it will be lodged where it needs to be lodged, among the studios, production companies, financiers, and decision makers of Hollywood. Following this respect will be active production, which will continue to generate respect—or not—depending on a combination of luck (good or bad), talent (large or small), and decisions (wise or stupid).

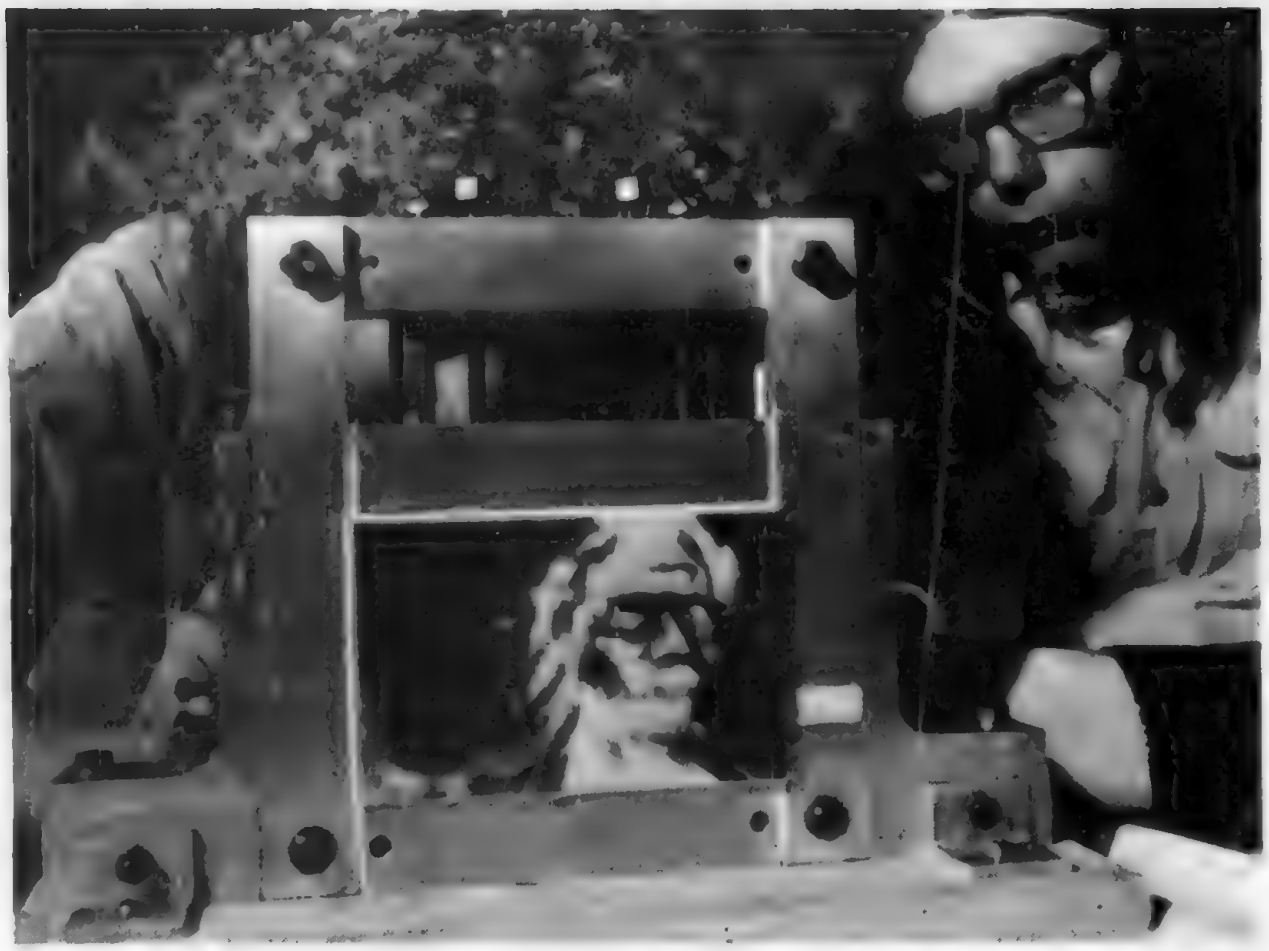
Respect for animation as both a craft and an art form is different. Here it is education and appreciation that must be plentiful, not gross receipts. A step towards respect of this kind was taken this year at the 1978 Los Angeles International Film Exposition (Filmex). Since 1971 Filmex has offered Los Angeles, and the Hollywood film industry, a yearly international look at contemporary film, and respectful (and retrospectful) looks at the history, craft, and art of film. Each year an aspect of film is highlighted by special programs, retrospectives, and conferences. In the past such subjects as music, producing, marketing, cinematography, and screenwriting were chosen as themes. This year it was animation.

The theme of each year's Exposition is chosen by the Filmex Selection Committee, a group of film professionals. Shortly after the end of Filmex 77, this committee met to decide on the theme of Filmex 78. Animation as a theme had been in line for several years. and, there being no objection to it, the committee made its choice for 1978 official. From that point, the planning and execution of special programs on animation became the job of assistant director for programming, Ruth Gribin, and her staff, which consisted of Dennis Bade, Anneliese Goldman, and myself. And, of course, volunteers. A non-profit cultural exercise like Filmex must depend on volunteers and it was two volunteers from the Selection Committee, Doug Edwards and Eric Sherman, who first stepped forward.

Both being lovers of independent abstract and experimental animation, Edwards and Sherman proposed to Ruth Gribin and Filmex director Gary Essert that they coordinate four programs under the overall title "American Independent Animation: Perspectives." In their plan, each program would look at animators who had contributed, in their words, "to the understanding of that which is uniquely filmic in the art of film." Those animators included Oskar Fischinger, the pioneer of non-objective animation; Jules Engel, head of the Department of Experimental Animation/Film Graphics at the California Institute of the Arts (Cal Arts); and Robert Breer, Larry Jordan, and Harry Smith, three independent animators considered together in one program. Also coordinated by Edwards and Sherman was a contemporary survey of representative work by 17 other independent animators.

Harry Arends, who has worked with the UCLA Film Archives, continued the setting of the tone by volunteering to coordinate three other special programs, retrospectives of the films of Max and Dave Fleischer, Walter Lantz, and Ub Iwerks, all studio animators of "cartoons."

Animation at Filmex 78 had become neatly divided.



Participants in the workshop working with a miniature version of Alexandre Alexeieff's pinscreen, which allows the formation of successive images by the pushing in and out of hundreds of tiny pins, which cause light and dark areas by the shadows produced.

Appropriately so, for animation itself seems to be divided into films created by the studio system and films created by individuals working alone. And the division seems to mean differences. The studio animators, although obviously pencil-in-hand artists, really create works that have a foundation in the performing arts ("Our basic thing was to make people laugh"—Chuck Jones). Music, vaudeville, drama, dance, as well as the newspaper comic strip, were the precursors of the studio animated cartoon. The independent animators are based in the fine arts ("My approach is purely from a point of view of a painter"—Jules Engel). Painting, drawing, lithography, and sculpture are art forms most independent animators have worked, and continue to work, in. There are overlaps of course. The best of the studio animators are fine artists, some exceptional draftsmen, some extraordinary with the human form; the design, layout, and background work are done by people with self images of painters rather than performers. And the independents are greatly influenced by music and dance. But the product is what reveals the true basis. The studio animated cartoon is there to be fun, to tell a story, to entertain. The independent animated film is usually a personal expression of one artist, sometimes a delving into particular philosophies of art, or a non-objective comment on form, shape, color, and movement. Both take advantage of a biological fact—persistence of vision—and both are engaging, fascinating, and enriching in their own ways.

So the tone of the theme was, purely by circumstance, set. The theme was animation, the tone was the two worlds of animation, the two ways to go. The studio, collaborative method that usually produces "works of entertainment," and the independent, individual method that usually produces "works of art." Not that works of entertaiment cannot be art, or that works of art cannot be entertaining. Indeed, the animation programs at Filmex 78 seemed to prove—to some at least—that that is definitely not the case.

Other volunteers appeared, other programs were set. Tee Bosustow and Marsha Jeffer offered to put together a retrospective of the work of United Productions of America (UPA), the breakaway studio that became a center of rebellion against the Disney style. James Hall, a member of Filmex's Short Films Selection Committee, coordinated a program that has become a tradition at Filmex, a retrospective of television commercials. In 1975 the program was entitled "And Now, a Word From Our Sponsor." In 1977 it was "And Now, Another Word From Our Sponsor." And this year it was "And Now, An Animated Word From Our Sponsor."

Another tradition, the annual International Tournee of Animation, a program of current animated film produced by Prescott Wright and sponsored by the International Animated Film Society (ASIFA), was contracted to have the premiere of its 13th edition at Filmex 78. And Lisze Bechtold, also a member of the Short Films Selection Committee, and an independent animator trained at Cal Arts, suggested that she organize an animation conference and workshop designed along the lines of the one held at the Ottawa Animation Festival in 1976. Also decided on was a series of American animated features to be presented free to the public, and a program made up of John Canemaker's two documentaries, *Remembering Winsor McCay* and *Otto Messmer and Felix the Cat*. All of these programs were presented at Filmex 78 during its 25-day run from April 13 through May 7.

Trying to program "Painted Movies: A Survey of American Animated Features" was almost a sad experience. It formed its own commentary on the lack of feature animation in this country. We had only 10 slots to fill, a

seemingly easy task. But unless you want to make it an all-Disney program, few features are left to choose from. In proportion to the live-action films made in this century, animated features hardly figure into the history of film. But we felt that this made the attempt worthwhile, for those films that were made are precious, and the viewing of them valuable. We did, of course, program some Disney. *Pinocchio* and *The Jungle Book* represented that studio. From that point on, our choices were made for two reasons: to show the work of as many different individuals as possible, and to screen features rarely seen for one reason or another. To represent Max and Dave Fleischer we chose *Gulliver's Travels,* a film often seen on TV, but—almost for that reason—an important film to view in a 35mm, large screen format. Bill Melendez was represented twice. *A Boy Named Charlie Brown,* the first *Peanuts* feature, was shown because of its popular appeal, and *Dick Deadeye,* Melendez's rock and bawdy version of Gilbert and Sullivan, was screened to give many a chance finally to see it. The same held for John Wilson's *Shinbone Alley,* based on the archy and mehitabel stories by Don Marquis. Although it is a film that has seen some criticism, the majority of the Filmex audience loved it, a group of them coming up to Wilson after the screening for his autograph.

Another rarely seen film was Chuck Jones and Abe Levitow's version of Norton Juster's *The Phantom Tollbooth.* Science-fiction writer David Gerrold, who created Star Trek's tribbles, was in the audience, and was quite vocal in his appreciation of the film after the screening.

Other features shown included Larry Jordan's new experimental film *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,* based on the Samuel Taylor Coleridge poem, and the Hanna-Barbera-produced *Charlotte's Web,* from E. B. White's book.

A very special screening was that of John and Faith Hubley's 1961 animated documentary *Of Stars and Men,* along with their recent television production of *A Doonesbury Special.* Faith Hubley was in the audience, and the screening became an emotional experience for her, bringing her to tears. *Of Stars and Men* is a difficult work. Based on a book by astronomer-cosmologist Harlow Shapley, it is a film full of ideas, sometimes expressed visually, sometimes in Shapley's narration. The Filmex audience was quiet during its screening, and seemed to appreciate it, for their applause at the end was warm and loud. The tears of Faith Hubley were generated by the memory that her late husband had rarely attended a screening of the film that did not see the audience cat call, boo, and hiss this non-funny cartoon.

Another warm experience was the screening of *Gulliver's Travels.* Grim Natwick attended and was greeted by enthusiastic applause when introduced to the audience. It was explained that he was the original designer and first animator of Betty Boop (applause), animated the character of Snow White in many scenes of Disney's film (applause), and animated the princess and directed a long scene in *Gulliver's Travels* (applause). The applause continued throughout the screening for different scenes, actions, and bits of animation; as audiences in other houses have applauded leaps by dancers, soliloquies by actors, and solos by musicians. It was a serious and sincere audience.

The animation conference and workshop was the centerpiece of the animation programs at Filmex 78. Lisze Bechtold designed the Filmex Conference to be a meeting ground between traditional studio animators and the independent, "one man, one film" animators. It didn't work out that way. Because of personal schedule requirements, it happened that most of the independents could only appear for the first weekend of the eight-day conference. Circumstances worked again to separate the two worlds of animation. The conference-workshop was divided neatly, and conveniently enhanced the tone of our theme. The workshop—a "hands-on" chance for the participants to make films—was scheduled for the first weekend, and it became a short course in non-traditional forms of animation. Our guests, and the animation techniques they spoke on and demonstrated, included:

Kathy Rose, Dennis Pies, Dan McLaughlin, Jules Engel,

Caroline Leaf demonstrating how she creates sand animation under the camera. Here she is using the Lyon-Lamb videotape system, which allows for instant playback of the animation.

and Sara Petty on paper animation, drawing and painting directly onto paper without the use of cels.

This year's Academy Award winner for his short animated film *Sand Castle*, Co Hoedeman (from the National Film Board of Canada) on model animation and pixilation.

Academy Award nominee (1976) for *The Street*, Caroline Leaf (NFB) on under-the-camera animation including paint on glass, sand, and cut-out animation.

Academy Award nominee (1975) for *Kick Me*, Robert Swarthe on cameraless techniques of painting and scratching on film.

And Jaques Drouin (NFB), creator of *Mindscape*, on Alexandre Alexeieff's pinscreen, which he used to make his film. Also demonstrated was the new Lyon-Lamb Video Animation System, and Kelly Hart's "Fluid Art Process," a paint-on-glass camera stand.

The rest of the week, except for a computer animation demonstration by Larry Cuba (*Star Wars*), was devoted to the studio animators. The sessions of talk and film included "An Evening with Chuck Jones"; "Working with the Hubleys" with guests Bill Littlejohn, Barrie Nelson, Lawrence Pressman, Lana Saunders, Richard Cox, Chuck Martin, Shelly Manne, Les Goldman, and Faith Hubley; "Days with Disney" with guests Frank Thomas, Ollie Johnston, Grim Natwick, Ward Kimball, T. Hee, Leo Salkin, and Cornett Wood; "Pioneers of the American Animated Cartoon," animation historian John Canemaker's presentation on early animators J.S. Blackton, J.R. Bray, Winsor McCay, Otto Messmer, and others; "The History Makers," a panel discussion, moderated by Canemaker, among Rudy Ising, Walter Lantz, Grim Natwick, Harry Love, and Dick Huemer; and "Fun With the Jay Ward Family" with guests Bill Scott, Bill Hurtz, June Foray, Daws Butler, Lew Keller, Sam Clayberger, and Helen Hanson.

Faith Hubley

The conference and workshop was organized by Bechtold to remain a small, intimate experience. The participants were limited to 50 with only 40 allowed to sign up for the "hands-on" workshop. Registration was such that an individual could sign up for just the conference (filmmakers in discussion), the workshop (demonstration of animation techniques and the chance to make a film), or several combinations of both. This gave each registrant a chance at the animation equipment that was donated for our use by several animation supply companies. With very little special publicity or advertising, the conference and workshop attracted an interesting range of participants, including high school and college art students, a public relations expert for a record distributor, a puppeteer, a carpenter-student with a major in environmental geography, art instructors and teachers, professionals in the animation industry, animation buffs, and writers.

It is definitely simplistic to say that putting together a conference and workshop—on any subject—is simple. And, yet, after the fact it always seems so. After the people are gathered, things are said, things are done, and an accomplishment is obviously made, it all seems so simple. Yet it was an extremely hard job of organizing, communicating, administrating. Bechtold had written several outlines of the way the conference should go. The first ones were quite grand, and were considered by advisors as a reach that would overextend. Each successive one was less grand, but always retained the essence of what she wanted—not just people talking, but people doing, experimenting, maybe experiencing animation for the first time. She was told by some that the whole workshop idea was impossible. No one would loan equipment, no one would cooperate. Bechtold and Filmex staff member Don Orlando made the proper calls, used the proper pleas, and found people more than cooperative. They ended up with donations of 16mm cameras, camera stands, the Lyon-Lamb Video Animation System, film stock, animation desks, and paper. And this equipment was used. There were a lot of smiles, applause, discovery, and excitement in the small workshop room.

"When you work in a studio, you're locked into other people's 'ideas'." A simultaneously positive and negative statement by Jules Engel. To be an individual,

"The Independents" (from left): Jules Engel, Dennis Pies, Sara Petty, Kathy Rose, and Dan McLaughlin.

alone, conceiving and creating from an idea of your own, is an appealing concept. To live under the tyranny of somebody else's idea is not. Not stated the way Engel states it, anyway. Engel is the image of the independent. He is determined to be alone in his creation, proud to be alone. Born in Budapest in 1918, Engel emigrated to the United States as a child. He worked in studio animation at Disney and UPA, but in 1960 became an independent animator. In 1969 he became the head of the Department of Film Graphics/Experimental Animation at Cal Arts. It is at Cal Arts that his influence has been the greatest, for he has not just taught his students, he has passed on his philosophy of filmmaking. He is, in fact, almost a propagandist for that philosophy, which some see as an attack on the traditional cartoon. He does seem to say "cartoonist," referring to studio animators, with a certain scorn in his voice; and "artist," referring to himself and his students, with almost pompous pride. And yet, if this is so, it might be a defensive attitude. For his art does not generate the loyalty and quick love that the finest "cartoons" do. There may be an attempt to compensate here. It does, though, cause some bad feelings; even some of his students argue with him and declare their love for Disney. It's sad. For there really is not, or should not be, any conflict between Engel's independent way of creating abstract, non-narrative works of graphic choreography, and the studio way of creating a good time, a piece of entertainment. Engel thinks of his films as something you would hang on the wall. And that is exactly what they are, as strange as that sounds for a film. But consider; with the rapid change and improvement of home entertainment hardware, with cable, video cassette decks, Disco-Vision, large-screen television all becoming, or soon to become, commonplace and affordable, is it not quite possible that an appreciator of Engel's work might have a copy (in cassette or disk form) of one of his films to "put up on the screen" so that he may enjoy the movement, the color, the shapes, the texture, the choreography of bringing all these elements together, that Engel has achieved? As he might hang a Picasso or Dali print to enjoy their effects? Of course it is. But that is not the same as that appreciator reading Mark Twain, listening to Aaron Copland, watching a play by Arthur Miller, or enjoying the comic view of life Chuck Jones shares with us through Wile E. Coyote and the Road Runner. One does not need to dominate the other, one cannot, should not, replace the other.

If Engel feels a need to defend his art by downgrading the animating cartoonist, he shouldn't. For his art is brilliant. Like dance, which he draws inspiration from, his frame-by-frame movements have an emotional impact, if you let them. You must relax and give yourself up to his art, as you must to appreciate most abstract work. His work is not work you think about, but work you feel. And the wonderful thing is, what you feel allows you to think, sets you in a mood for contemplation. Like music, his art seems to be intellectual in conception, and emotional in appreciation.

Engel's position about studio animation is possibly being misunderstood. His true complaint may be his objection to "client-oriented" animation, work being done for someone else, whereas the independent works only for himself. That is certainly true. But what should be remembered is that much of the great art accomplished in the history of man was client art, was art done for someone else. Michelangelo was commissioned—not inspired—to paint the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. It is not really whether you do art for a client, or not, but whether you do it with integrity, or not.

But to be an independent—for those who want to be one—is indeed an attractive situation. The works shown of the other independents who were guests at the Conference are all personal individual statements or explorations; they are the way they are only because there was a single controlling judgment behind them. For example, and in contrast to Engel's abstract work, Caroline Leaf's *The Street* is a strong narrative film based on a story by Canadian writer Mordecai Richler. ("Telling stories is important to

"Fun with the Jay Ward Family" (from left): Sam Clayberger, Daws Butler, June Foray, Bill Scott, and Bill Hurtz.

me, I like that"—Leaf). Being the story of the effects of the long illness and eventual death of "the grandmother" on a Jewish family, it is a film that could have been done in a studio. (Although—point to think about—few studios handle dramatic subjects.) It could have been storyboarded in the normal way. A production designer could have been called in to give the film its look. Animators could have been handed their assignment to complete scenes. But it was done by Leaf, by herself, hunched over a small glass field, moving, nudging with her fingers, non-drying paint around to form her successive images. The film has a definited painted look, with the benefits that involves. The characters and the backgrounds come from the same universe, are truly related. It could not have been done any other way. A production designer could not have stood behind Leaf, and done his work, as she did hers. She had to do it herself. And, in viewing the film, we feel very close to the action, very much as if we were placed within it as it moves, as Leaf was when she moved it. I'm not sure this could be done—that anyone would think to do it—the traditional way.

Animation from the studios is a communal art form; films accomplished by many rather than one. This means, of course, that there are just too many people making artistic judgements along the line to make any studio film a truly "personal" expression, as the films of the independents are. But, nevertheless, the studio system of animation has been, in its way, independent. Independent from the rest of cinema, from live action, the big, powerful, money-filled, star-studded, attention-grabbing, "real" way to make movies. The curse of studio animation has been the lack of attention by the "important" people in the industry more concerned with "important" matters. It has meant little money for animation, bungled distribution, and a frivolous regard from the public. But the lack of attention has also meant that the animation studios, like neglected children, have drawn within themselves and developed distinctive personalities. Each studio's output bears a stamp, a tag that distinguishes it from other studios. That stamp is each studio's own particular "intelligence," which is the result, I believe, of a small group of people working closely together. If the animation studios are communities, they are very small communities, or, possibly, they are each nothing larger than an extended family.

Working in such a family, in a collaborative manner, is attractive to some artists. The give and take, the sharing of ideas, the getting to know the minds of the others, all of the attributes of any team effort, is to some a very comfortable way to create, and one not so lonely. This is the view of creating in a studio environment that was revealed during the animation conference: the cooperative effort of many talents.

Other points also came across. Chuck Jones explained how the lack of certain freedoms actually forced the Warner Bros. cartoonists to perfect their craft. A sense of timing, one of the most important elements in animation, was thrust on the Warner Bros. animators by the restriction that each short had to be exactly six minutes. There was never any grace one way or the other.

The animation director as a director of actors, and the animator as actor, was explored in the sessions on the Hubleys and Disney. Lawrence Pressman and his wife Lana Saunders, who provided voices for John and Faith Hubley's *Everybody Rides the Carousel*, claimed that John and Faith drew out of them performances more personal than any they

"Days with Disney": Above (from left), T. Hee, Cornett Wood, and Frank Thomas. Below, Ward Kimball, Leo Salkin, and Ollie Johnston.

had done before. Richard Cox, who was the voice of Zonker in *A Doonesbury Special,* said he was amazed that the animated character moved, glanced, and held attitudes that expressed exactly what he, the actor, felt as he recorded the role; even during those times when there was no dialogue. A tribute to animator Bill Littlejohn, who in turn paid tribute to John Hubley: "We just had to follow his motions. It was just marvelous."

The Disney animators and story people in attendance said much the same about Walt Disney, calling him an excellent actor and director who could communicate clearly what he wanted. His performance during a story seesion was, they said, the film itself.

Since it was the last session, the end of the conference, the session with the Jay Ward family was designed to be just fun. We wanted laughs, amusing anecdotes, to hear Bill Scott, Daws Butler, and June Foray do their famous crazy voices. We got all that. But also, very serious statements were made, statements that held for the other studios. Jay Ward was portrayed as a man who knows exactly what he wants, and settles for little less. This seems true about the Hubleys, about Disney, about the Warner directors. They were strong

individuals who acted as the heads of their own extended families, who led in the best sense of the word. This, plus the talents that made up each family, gave these studios the personalities mentioned above. More complex, more layered, more fascinating personalities than can be found among any of the live-action studios.

I mentioned that the animation program at Filmex 78 was a step toward respect for the art, craft, and entertainment of animation. But was it really? Can programs like this truly have an effect? Especially since relatively few people attended. I suppose it depends on who those people were. One was Charles Schreger, a reporter for *Daily Variety*. His feeling for it, what he learned, and the understanding of animation that he came to, he put into a feature article that ran in *Variety* on May 8, the day after Filmex 78 ended. Some excerpts:

"It took a year of planning, hundreds of films and speakers from around the world for the just completed Los Angeles International Film Exposition to lay a rumor to rest, one which has been haunting an art form for 50 years: animation is more than cartoons for children.

"A lot more.

"It's full length features, 30-second commercials, paintings that move, dancing in two dimensions, Walt Disney, a stuttering pig, castles made of sand, mandarin oranges choreographed by Busby Berkeley, computers and a few hundred other things no one's thought of yet...

"Now that class is out, the old definitions won't work any more. Yes, an animated film is one that is brought to life frame by frame, one which creates movement. But it's much more than that, although it's difficult to say exactly what and still be inclusive. The field is that rich.

"The Filmex focus was divided into seven sections. It did not attempt to present a thumbnail history, a 'greatest hits' of animation. It was, instead, an effort to illustrate the scope of the field...

"When it was all over, the festival's animation program opened up more questions than it answered, a tribute to its success. The biggest question it raised, was, what is animation?

"It's a highly personal, commercially risky medium with enormous possibilities, many of which remain open for discovery.

"What it's not, however, is simply an art form for children."

"The History Makers" (from left): Walter Lantz, Harry Love, Dick Huemer, Grim Natwick, and Rudolf Ising.

'The Family Upstairs' Moves Back In

By MIKE BARRIER

The first page of *The Smithsonian Collection of Newspaper Comics* (Smithsonian/Abrams; $27.50 hardcover, $12.50 paper) is taken up by the following quotation from a letter from Edmund Wilson:

"I have enormous respect for the comic strip as a potential story and art form, although far too few of its productions have realized that potential. If those few, however, could be gathered into some sort of complete collection, the effect on those who have scorned the comics as a whole might well be devastating . . . "

Wilson's letter was addressed to Bill Blackbeard, the collector and scholar whose San Francisco Academy of Comic Art was the source of the strips reprinted in the Smithsonian volume. Blackbeard was co-editor of the book, with Martin Williams of the Smithsonian's Division of Performing Arts. Their generally excellent book would have been better if they had taken Wilson's advice more seriously.

First, the good news. The book contains extensive excerpts from some of the best comic strips. Long sequences—weeks of dailies or Sundays—from "Moon Mullins," "Thimble Theatre," "Mickey Mouse," "Barnaby," and "Barney Google" are reproduced just as they were published in the newspapers, with none of the cutting and pasting and mishandling that is typical of reprint volumes. We can see, in the fine color reproductions of a half dozen "Polly and Her Pals" Sunday pages, just why this strip is still regarded so highly. "The Bungle Family," Harry Tuthill's acid strip about a family that can't quite cope, is deservedly resurrected in nine well-chosen Sunday pages.

These strips, and a few others of comparable quality (and quantity), are the heart of the book, and reason enough for buying it. But there should be more of them. I was disappointed to find only two Sundays each for "Moon Mullins" and "Barney Google," and no daily "Pollys" or "Thimble Theatres." The combined daily "Moon" and "Barney" occupy fewer pages than are allotted to a single episode from "Wash Tubbs," a strip of lesser interest.

Almost 100 different strips are represented in the book's pages. If its editors had tried to follow Edmund Wilson's dictum, instead of applying their own more relaxed criteria, their book would have contained about two dozen titles, and most of them would have been given more space than they are now allowed. When measured against the test implicit in Wilson's letter, none of the strips in the book are adquately represented, with the possible exceptions of "Mickey Mouse," "Wash Tubbs," "Thimble Theatre," and "Barnaby."

There are simply too many dud strips scattered through the *Smithsonian Collection*'s pages. Most of them are represented by only a few strips or Sunday pages—many by only a single example—but collectively, they take up a lot of valuable space. It is hard to think of any justification for devoting three pages to the likes of "Nibsy the Newsboy," "The Naps of Polly Sleepyhead," and "Dok's Dippy Duck," to name a few of the worst offenders. Examples of such strips might fit in a historical survey of the comic strip—someone might be interested in "Nibsy" as an example of George McManus' early work, or in "Polly Sleepyhead" as a negative confirmation of Winsor McCay's brilliance, since McCay did so much more with the same basic idea in "Little Nemo in Slumberland." But I cannot see what they are doing in a book that purports to be showing us the best, rather than the most.

Similarly, the inclusion of a dozen current strips in the back of the book is pointless, since we can see equally good examples of most of them—"Peanuts," "Broom Hilda," etc.—simply by turning to today's comics page.

Other strips seem to be in the book only because of their curiosity value; we can learn from reading the *Smithsonian Collection* that Rea Irvin, John Held Jr., and Dr. Seuss all turned out bad comic strips in the midst of their otherwise distinguished careers. That is a bit of knowledge that I could have done without.

On the other hand, there are some disappointing strips that are in the book for a good reason. Some strips—"Mutt and Jeff," "Bringing Up Father," "The Katzenjammer Kids"—loom so large in the history of the comics that it would seem odd to leave them out; we should have the opportunity to judge them for ourselves. On the evidence of the reprinted examples (fairly extensive ones) in the Smithsonian book, none of those three strips was ever very good. As may be true of some current strips ("Doonesbury" leaps to mind), their appeal was apparently unique to their own time, and now they are relics.

Two other comic-strip titans—"The Gumps" and "Gasoline Alley"—are poorly represented in the book, with the explanation that to sample their narratives adequately would require too many pages. Needless to say, I think those pages could have been found by dumping a few dozen strips with a lesser claim on our attention.

There are good strips in the book whose inclusion could be questioned, too, because they have already been reprinted to some extent. It is hard for me to complain about the presence of "Krazy Kat" and "Pogo" Sunday pages, but if those strips were to be represented

in this book, their importance to comic-strip history required that they be represented by more examples than we are given. If the existing reprint volumes are sufficient, the reader should have been referred to them.

Tokenism is the curse of the book. Color page after color page is wasted on samplings from "Buck Rogers," "Tarzan," "Alley Oop," "Prince Valiant"—the list could go on, and on. Too many "serious" strips are presented to us as bleeding stumps—a few examples are lifted from the midst of a narrative, tantalizing the reader but leaving with him no clear idea of the cartoonist's story-telling ability.

"Wash Tubbs," alone among the adventure strips, is given the deluxe treatment: 18 weeks of dailies reproduced intact. We are told by the editors that this sequence "is regarded by its devotees as the graphic and narrative apogee of the strip." That does not speak well for "Wash Tubbs," because the sequence—although beautifully drawn—is crude, loosely structured melodrama.

I have been disappointed by "serious" strips in general—"Flash Gordon," "Prince Valiant," "Terry," the whole pantheon—as I have read them in this and other reprint volumes. Typically, they are superbly illustrated, but written on a juvenile level—boys' fiction in fancy dress. The truly adult strips are to be found garbed in a "big foot" cartoon style, or something close to it. Clearly, it is these strips—Segar's "Thimble Theatre" in particular—in which the editors of the *Smithsonian Collection* feel the strongest interest. I only wish that they had enough confidence in their own taste, and in their readers, to junk the dross that fills too many of their book's pages, and to replace it with worthier material.

Despite its shortcomings, the *Smithsonian Collection* is the one book that anyone who cares about the comic strip should own. And fortunately, many of its defects may be remedied by a new series of books that promises, in its cumulative impact, to be far more important than the *Smithsonian Collection* itself.

This series, under the rubric "Classic

The following volumes in the "Classic American Comic Strips" series are discussed in the accompanying review:

Skippy (1925-1926) by Percy L. Crosby (160 pages; $16.95 hardcover, $7.95 paper).

Barney Google (1919-1920) by Billy DeBeck (128 pages; $15.95 hardcover, $6.95 paper).

The Family Upstairs (1910-1912) by George Herriman (224 pages; $17.95 hardcover, $8.95 paper).

Winsor McCay's Dream Days (1903-1914) by Winsor McCay (192 pages; $17.95 hardcover, $8.95 paper).

Bringing Up Father (1913-1914) by George McManus (176 pages; $17.95 hardcover, $8.95 paper).

Thimble Theatre (1928-1930) by Elzie C. Segar (192 pages; $17.95 hardcover, $8.95 paper).

Polly and Her Pals (1912-1913) by Cliff Sterrett (144 pages; $15.95 hardcover, $6.95 paper).

Minute Movies (1927-1928) by Ed Wheelan (176 pages; $15.95 hardcover, $6.95 paper).

Hyperion has also published these other volumes in the series:

School Days (1923-1924) by Clare Victor (Dwig) Diggins (160 pages; $14.95 hardcover, $6.95 paper).

A. Mutt (1907-1908) by Harry C. (Bud) Fisher (160 pages; $16.95 hardcover, $7.95 paper).

Connie (1929-1930) by Frank Godwin (176 pages; $15.95 hardcover, $6.95, paper).

Bobo Baxter (1927-1928) by Rube Goldberg (176 pages; $16.95 hardcover, $7.95 paper).

Baron Bean (1916-1917) by George Herriman (112 pages; $14.50 hardcover, $5.95 paper).

Abie the Agent (1914-1915) by Harry Hershfield (112 pages; $14.50 hardcover, $5.95 paper).

Dauntless Durham of the U.S.A. (1913-1914) by Harry Hershfield (128 pages; $14.95 hardcover, $6.50 paper).

Napoleon (1932-1933) by Clifford McBride (112 pages; $14.50 hardcover, $5.95 paper).

Sherlocko the Monk (1910-1913) by Gus Mager (288 pages; $17.95 hardcover, $8.95 paper).

Jim Hardy (1936-1937) by Dick Moores (112 pages; $14.50 hardcover, $5.95 paper).

Happy Hooligan (1904-1905) by Frederick Burr Opper (128 pages; $14.95 hardcover, $6.50 paper).

Buster Brown (1906) by Richard F. Outcault (128 pages; $14.95 hardcover, $6.50 paper).

Bobby Thatcher (1927) *together with Phil Hardy* (1925-1926) by George Storm (192 pages; $16.95 hardcover, $7.95 paper).

The Bungle Family (1928) by Harry J. Tuthill (144 pages; $14.95 hardcover; $6.50 paper).

All of these books can be ordered directly from the publisher, Hyperion Press, Inc. 45 Riverside Ave., Westport, Ct. 06880. Add 35 cents per book for postage and handling costs.

A 20-page catalog, describing each book in detail, is available from the publisher on request.

American Comic Strips," began publication last year, with 22 volumes collecting such strips as "Skippy," "Polly and Her Pals," "Bringing Up Father," and "Thimble Theatre," in many cases picking up the strips at their beginnings and following them without a break for a year or two. Bill Blackbeard is the editor of the series, and the source of the strips.

Eight volumes have been made available for review by the publisher, Hyperion Press, Inc., of Westport, Ct., and they invite a mixed reaction. Certainly the elegance of the *Smithsonian Collection* is lacking; the printing, paper, and general design of the Hyperion series leave a great deal to be desired. One of the books—the one devoted to the first year and a half of "Bringing Up Father"—must have been bedevilled by gremlins at some point in its production, because strips are repeated throughout the book.

Beyond that, the strips themselves vary markedly in quality. Sometimes, the variations are within the book. The "Skippy" volume, for example, is half routine kid jokes and half perceptive comedy of the kind that makes clear why so many people are uncomfortable in the presence of children: their naked ids remind us of how poorly our own are controlled.

I cannot, in good conscience, recommend some of the books even to readers with a consuming interest in the comics. "Bringing Up Father," as the Hyperion volume demonstrates, was tiresome from the start (and, as the *Smithsonian Collection* demonstrates, was tiresome later on). I could not finish the collection from Ed Wheelan's "Minute Movies"; the strip is so heavy with captions that reading it is like seeing double.

But the other volumes are worthy of a place on anyone's shelf. There is, for example, "The Family Upstairs," the George Herriman strip from which "Krazy Kat" evolved. It is a remarkable display of Herriman's skill at ringing changes on a very limited theme, in this case the Dingbat family's unsuccessful efforts to confront the cacophonous family in the flat above them. The Hyperion collection gives us a complete run of this strip, from 1910-1912.

Reading the "Barney Google" collection of strips from 1919-1920 is a little like holding an egg up to a candle; we can see the life stirring inside, but it's not quite hatched yet. Barney in the first year of the strip was already a comic rogue, but his roguery had not reached the level of refinement represented in the *Smithsonian Collection*'s excerpts from 10 years later. By then, Barney had become literally as well as figuratively a "little man" (he is quite tall in the Hyperion collection). The Hyperion book is well worth having, since it shows us a great strip in embryo.

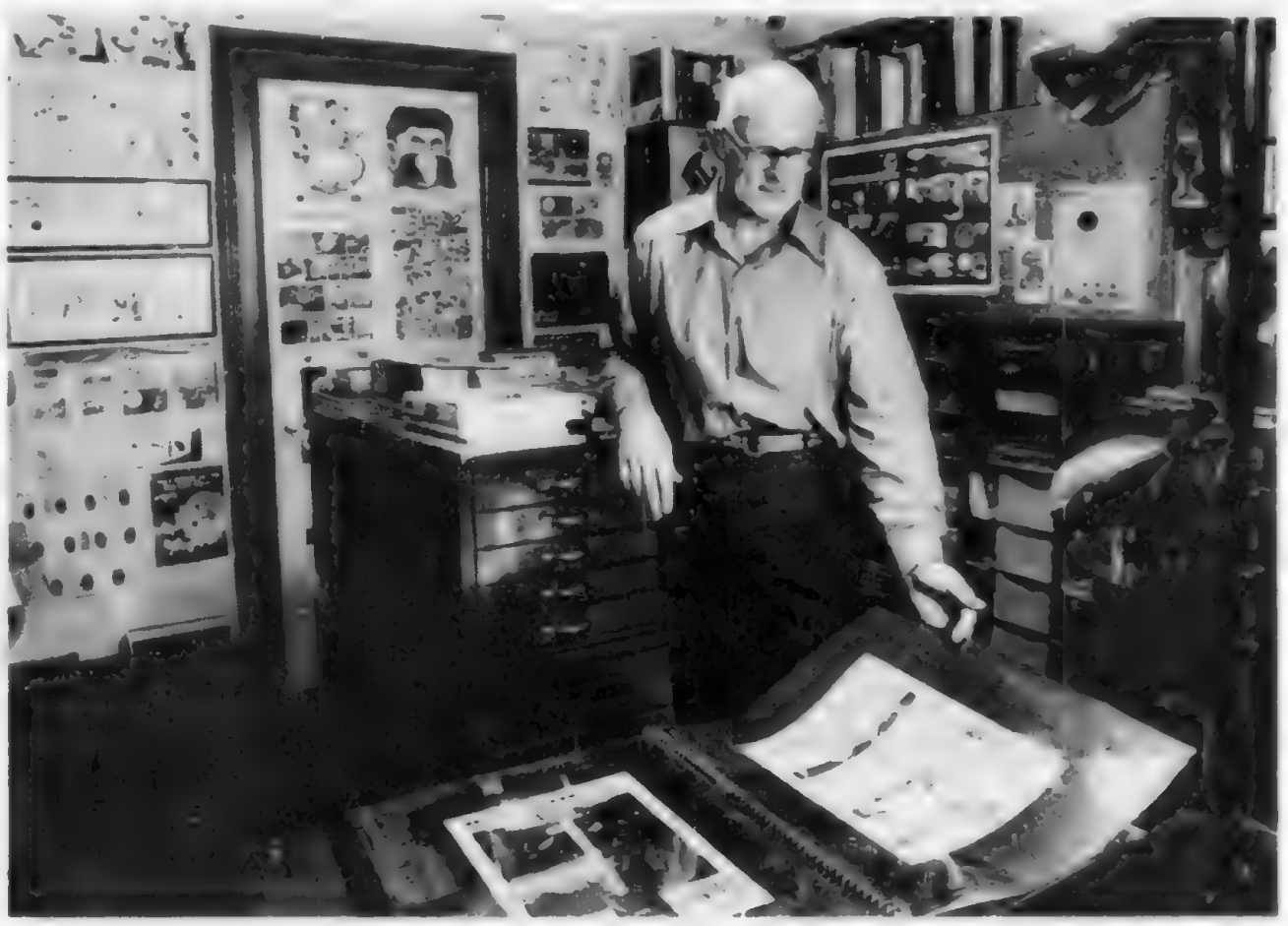
"Polly and Her Pals," in a collection from 1912-1913, the strip's first year, is a real find, not because of Cliff Sterrett's graphic daring (that would come later, as represented by the Sunday pages in the Smithsonian book), but because the strip is like a time capsule from the long-dead days before World War I. The early "Polly," like some other early strips, seems to have been pressed more closely against everyday life than any of today's strips are. For that reason, it is one of my favorites of the Hyperion series.

Winsor McCay's Dream Days, an assortment of strips from 1904-1914, is a useful supplement to McCay's much more widely known "Little Nemo" Sunday pages. The book is made up mostly of other "dream" strips. They are just as brilliant as "Nemo"—if not as spectacular—and actually more readable.

The most important among the Hyperion volumes, however, is the one devoted to almost two years—September 1928 to May 1930—of E.C. Segar's "Thimble Theatre." Popeye entered this strip on January 17, 1929, and in the pages of the Hyperion book we see him gradually come to dominate it.

I still have not sorted out my feelings about "Thimble Theatre." As viewed from many angles, I do not find it an especially satisfactory strip. The narrative construction is loose and often arbitrary, the gags are seldom very funny on their own, and the drawing and staging are elementary at best. What redeems the strip is the casual eccentricity of its characters; "Thimble Theatre" is so heavily populated with zanies that it is the occasional "normal" character who seems weird. Popeye, Wimpy, Olive Oyl, and the rest of Segar's cast are bizarre, in both looks and behavior; and yet, because they are comfortable with themselves, we are comfortable with them. They are agreeable monsters.

I suspect that Segar's work in particular loses something when collected in book form, because it is so



Bill Blackbeard.

loose and easy-going, and thus made to order for consumption in daily bites. Strips that seemed relaxed and fresh when read in newspapers over a span of 20 months can seem slack and repetitious when read in a couple of evenings. Significantly, 11 strips are missing from the Hyperion collection, and one Sunday page was accidentally omitted from the *Smithsonian Collection* (it is being restored in a new printing of the book). Yet, there is no sense, in either book, that something is missing. Segar's stories were put together for the convenience of the daily newspaper reader, who could miss a couple of days—or even a couple of weeks—and still not lose his bearings.

This does not mean that Segar's strips are too pokey for the modern reader to enjoy—far from it. But it *does* mean that the reader should shift his mental gears before settling down with a book like Hyperion's Segar reprints. He is not reading a comic book, which was intended to be gulped down in a single sitting, but rather a collection of strips each of which was intended to divert subway strap-hangers for only a few seconds a day.

Some of the other strips reprinted in the Hyperion series can become a little cloying, too, when too many of them are read at a single sitting. "The Family Upstairs," for example, was an impressive strip, but the more of it one reads at a sitting, the more visible become its mechanics—the formulas that Herriman used and re-used, with slight variations. The daily reader of the strip would probably not have been aware of such things.

It is a measure of the importance of the Hyperion books, and of the *Smithsonian Collection*, that they permit us to talk about such matters as how best to read long runs of strips like "Thimble Theatre" and "The Family Upstairs." A few years ago, anyone interested in those strips would have had to search out microfilms of old newspapers, or inadequate comic-book reprints. Thanks largely to Bill Blackbeard, enough strips are returning to print to make intelligent discussion of them possible. Extensive excerpts from Segar's "Thimble Theatre" have now been published in three volumes—the 1928-1930 dailies in the Hyperion book, 1933-34 Sunday pages in the Smithsonian book, and dailies from 1936-37 in a 1971 Nostalgia Press collection. This is not enough, of course—all of Segar's work should be reprinted—but it is at least enough to permit a reader to begin deciding for himself whether Segar deserves the exalted status claimed for him. All of the Hyperion reprints—even of mediocre strips—have the same great virtue: they let us know the strips themselves, instead of just their reputations. This is an incalculable blessing to everyone who cares about the comics and their history.

'Metamorphoses'

Metamorphoses is an animated feature that was produced in this country by the Japanese-owned Sanrio studio, and directed by Takashi, a Japanese-born veteran of American TV-cartoon studios.

It is not quite fair to review *Metamorphoses* at this time, because the film has been withdrawn from circulation to be reworked. As released last spring, *Metamorphoses* was about 90 minutes long, and contained no dialogue or narration; the soundtrack was restricted to oppressively "modern" music and one song each by Joan Baez, the Pointer Sisters, and the Rolling Stones (whose names were prominently featured in advertising for the film, despite their limited roles). The revised version, which may be released in the summer of 1979, will be shorter, and narration and titles will be added.

Such changes cannot help but make the film more accessible. *Metamorphoses* would have been a problematic film under any circumstances, consisting as it does of five episodes (plus a prologue) from classical mythology; that is not the stuff of which popular successes are usually made. But in the film as it was originally released, Takashi compounded the difficulties that *Metamorphoses* presented to its audience simply by virtue of its subject matter. In the original version, the five sections blend into one another, and the same character, a boy, turns up in a different role in each story. If you had not brushed up on your Ovid, or your Edith Hamilton, before seeing the film, you were almost certain to be confused. (The reference to Ovid in the film's title should not be taken seriously. The myths used in the film can be found in Ovid's great poem—as can many others—but there is nothing about Takashi's *Metamorphoses* that specifically recalls Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.)

It is not surprising that, according to *Variety*, *Metamorphoses* played in a few areas "to good first week business, and then a rapid fall-off." That pattern confirmed what *Variety* had said a few months earlier in its review of the film: "Word of mouth will probably not help."

I doubt that word of mouth will help the new version, either. The basic problem with *Metamorphoses* is not that it is confusing to its audiences. The film itself is so confused that adding narration and eliminating empty footage (and there is a lot of that) will not make much difference.

The Greco-Roman myths invite a serious treatment; they have fed the imaginations of Western painters, sculptors, writers, and musicians for many centuries, and some filmmakers (such as Jean Cocteau) have found inspiration in them as well. *Metamorphoses* often seems to be straining to be worthy of its subject matter; there is, for example, one scene that suggests—if only for a moment—the 19th century French painter Ingres' treatment of a mythological subject in his "Jupiter and Thetis." The production is generally lavish—at least by contemporary standards—and there are embellishments (such as the use of colored ink lines for the characters) that seem downright extravagant in these days of Xeroxed cels.

Unfortunately, the film's aspirations seem to shrink the closer we get to its heart—that is, to how the myths are retold. Too often, Takashi uses other films as crutches—the prologue owes a great deal to *2001*, and there are scenes throughout the film that have been

Scenes from Metamorphoses*: the myths of Perseus (top) and the House of Envy.*

lifted almost bodily from such Disney features as *Bambi* and *Fantasia*. Sadly, the animation in those scenes is probably the best in the picture, because there, at least, the animators had something solid to work with. For the most part, the animation looks like a cry for help from animators who don't really know what they're supposed to do, because no one has bothered to tell them. It is "full" animation, with lots of drawings, but it is cold and mechanical.

Much of the animation in *Metamorphoses* is in fact a perfect illustration for what shold be a rule of the craft: if a facial expression can be labeled, it should not be used. Not long ago, I ran across an article by E.H. Gombrich in which he discussed the subtlety of Rembrandt's depiction of human emotions. He noted that "those distinct emotions which figure in the ancient manuals of painting and acting as the 'passions,' remorse, contempt, anger, love, or joy, are only simplified abstractions out of the infinite gamut of fluctuating and ambivalent emotions that make up the life of the soul." By contrast, he continued, "Rembrandt entered into an uncharted region of the soul where these descriptive terms lose much of their meaning . . . Rembrandt learned how to be indefinite without being vague."

There is literally no facial expression in *Metamorphoses*—no expression of emotion by any means—that cannot be translated into words, and simple and obvious words at that. A character may be "happy" or "sad" or "suspicious" or "jealous" at a given moment, but there is no suggestion that these emotions are in flux within the same creature, with one and then another gaining ascendancy at a given moment. Instead, we have a gallery of the "passions," and nothing more.

Even this could have been acceptable if *Metamorphoses* had been conceived as a stylized, formal film; but Takashi's intentions seem to have been just the opposite. The principal characters—the boy, and a girl who turns up in two episodes—are cartoon-cute; they were obviously designed to be as immediately appealing as many Disney characters, although they suggest the characters in Japanese-made TV cartoons more than anything in a Disney film. Dropping such characters into Greek myths is like hanging a painting of Astro Boy in the Parthenon.

At some points, the film crosses the line from the incongruous to the absolutely ludicrous. This happens in the telling of the myth of Actaeon, when the boy is transformed by the goddess Diana into a stag that looks remarkably like Rudolph the Red-nosed Reindeer. This silly-looking deer is pursued and killed by hounds that are blood brothers of the vicious dogs in *Bambi*.

At best, if Takashi's characters really *were* appealing, they would be inadequate to the demands of the myths. But because they are wind-up dolls, with nothing real about them, they are insufferable. By the end of the film, after I had watched the boy's face twitch through its limited repertoire of grimaces over and over again, I was ready to throw a brick through the screen.

Metamorphoses was sunk from the beginning by fundamental failures in direction; Takashi could not even execute his bad ideas well, much less come up with good ones. No matter how much footage is cut, no matter how many titles are added, that cannot be cured.

The cost of *Metamorphoses* has been put at $6 million, twice the original budget. For that sum, three or four features could have been made by young animation filmmakers whose ideas, and whose mastery of the medium, are almost certainly superior to Takashi's. And whose sense of what an audience will pay to see could hardly be any worse. *M.B.*

'Jungle Book'

The Jungle Book was the last feature cartoon that Walt Disney personally supervised, but seeing it again in 1978—11 years after its first release—I was struck by its resemblance to the Disney features that have been made since Walt's death. *The Jungle Book* is very much of a piece with *The Aristocats, Robin Hood,* and *The Rescuers*—and for that matter, with *The Sword in the Stone*, the feature that preceded it. All of these Disney features were directed by Wolfgang (Woolie) Reitherman, and it is his hand, more than Walt's, that one sees at work in *The Jungle Book*. We have always known that Walt Disney gradually turned away from animation after World War II, and did so decisively in the early '60s. To see *Jungle Book* again this year, and to compare it with the features that have followed it, is to become aware of how much control over the animated features Walt had relinquished well before his death.

Reitherman has been in some respects a curious choice to succeed Walt Disney as the man in charge of the animated features. He was never known as a "personality" animator; he was associated rather with action (he animated Monstro the whale in *Pinocchio*, and the Tyrannosaurus Rex in *Fantasia*) and comedy (he animated for Jack Kinney on Kinney's memorable Goofy shorts of the 40's).

Reitherman's work as a director has been an extension of his work as an animator. From *Sword in the Stone* onward, broad comedy and furious activity have been the distinguishing characteristics of the Disney feature cartoons. Sentiment—so much a part of the early Disney features—does not figure much in the new ones, and when it is introduced, Reitherman is plainly uncomfortable with it, as he is with irony or anything else that requires delicate shading to be effective. Near the end of *The Jungle Book*, for example, there is a sticky passage when Baloo the bear has apparently been killed, and Bagheera the panther is eulogizing him in pseudo-scriptural language. It is hard to tell whether we are supposed to take this seriously or not; the director's signals are not clear. If we knew from the beginning that Baloo was still alive, we could chuckle at Bagheera's sanctimoniousness; if we were persuaded that Baloo was really dead, we could weep with his friend, the boy Mowgli. But we are shown that Baloo is still alive precisely at the moment when it seems most like a cheat—we have been sucked in, but not quite far enough. We are not pleasantly surprised that Baloo

is still with us, because we have not been sure he was gone.

Fortunately, unpleasant moments of this kind are rare in the Reitherman-directed features, because Reitherman does not venture into such territory very often. Under his direction, the Disney features have striven to be amiable and amusing, and little more. In their comedy, and especially in their use of voices, they are clearly a product of the television age, and they have been consistently successful with a young audience nurtured on TV programs. They simply do not aim as high as did the prewar Disney classics and the best of the postwar features, and I know of no one who claims that they do. There is no trace in the Reithermnan-directed features of the restlessness, the constant search for something better, that characterized the Disney cartoons throughout the '30s and early '40s, and was still visible in parts of such cartoons as *Cinderella* and *Lady and the Tramp*.

By the early '60s, Walt Disney himself had clearly lost the enthusiasm he once had for exploring animation's frontiers. After the expensive debacle of *Sleeping Beauty*, Disney was ready to retreat to more modest animated features — and Reitherman was the instrument he chose to bring about this change.

©1967 Walt Disney Productions

From The Jungle Book*: Mowgli and Baloo (top), and Shere Khan and Kaa.*

Disney's principal animators—those of the "Nine Old Men" who were still animating when Reitherman became sole director of the features--never really fit into the new scheme of things. Frank Thomas, Ollie Johnston, Milt Kahl, Eric Larson, the late John Lounsbery—all of these great animators blossomed at a time when "personality animation" was what the Disney features were all about. That is no longer the case; the newer features have not made the demands on the veteran animators' skills that the earlier features did.

The veteran Disney animators really belonged on pictures with ambitions greater than those of Reitherman's features. Because their beautiful animation is better than what is needed to tell *Jungle Book*'s story adequately, much of the animation has a dry and studied look. Bagheera moves marvelously, like a real panther, but since there is nothing in the story itself that requires him to move like a panther (the fact that he's a specific kind of animal doesn't make much difference), his feline movements look too much like academic exercises.

In one instance, the dryness of the animation in *The Jungle Book* is used to advantage, to enhance the elegance of Shere Khan the tiger. Milt Kahl's animation of the tiger would be even more impressive if *The Jungle Book* were a different kind of movie, and the tiger more of a menace, but at least the gap between substance and technique was closed.

To wish that *The Jungle Book* were a different kind of film is to wish that the history of the Disney studio after 1959 —and, indeed, since World War II— were radically different. *The Jungle Book* and the features that followed it were as inevitable as the sunrise; in them, as in so many other aspects of the Disney studio's operations, Walt's heirs

have abided by his wishes.

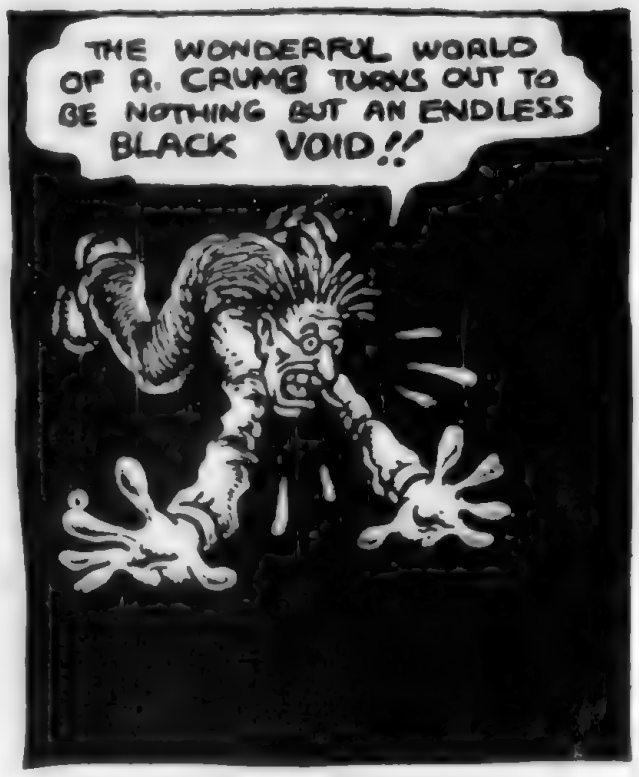
The fork in the road did not come when Walt died; the present pattern had been fixed by that time. The real test comes now, with none of the "Nine Old Men" still animating, and Reitherman's retirement only a few years away. Within the next few years, we should know if the Disney studio is once again a vital force in animation, or has become simply a historical site. *M.B.*

R. Crumb

I have been preoccupied with animation for the last four or five years, and I have let my reading of underground comics slide. For about five years—from 1967 to 1972, or thereabouts—I enjoyed many of the underground comics tremendously, but then monotony set in, and undergrounds began to seem as trapped in formulas as the commercial comic books. The Supreme Court's pornography decision in 1973 left the comix more vulnerable to legal attack (after they had weathered assaults on *Zap* No. 4 and other raunchy items), and they seemed to wither just as the "straight" comics had in the early '50s, at the height of the anti-comics hysteria. The brief history of the undergrounds is like a compact version of the history of commercial comic books. The commercial comic books picked up steam for a few years in the '30s and early '40s, and enjoyed a great flowering in the late '40s and early '50s, when artists like Barks, Stanley, and Kelly, and companies like EC, were at their best. Then the market was flooded, and the good comics were condemned for the excesses of their inferiors.

Similarly, the undergrounds were born in the alternative papers of the early '60s, and then broke out in books like *Zap* and *Bijou*. In a few years, the market was swamped with third- and fourth-rate comix—many of them blatantly pornographic—and it was ripe for a fall when the Supreme Court decision arrived.

There is one important difference between the '50s and the '70s; back then, comic books were at the center of a national debate, but this time, they have risen and fallen without much public



From Carload o' Comics.

notice.

The comic books of the '40s and '50s have begun turning up in handsomely bound reprint editions, and the underground comics — in keeping with their accelerated schedule — are now being collected in the same way. The collections of undergrounds are, however, in paperback; hard covers wouldn't really be appropriate for the comix, which have prided themselves on a pulp sleaziness even more pronounced than that of the commercial comics.

Two of the most important such books are devoted to the work of Robert Crumb. *R. Crumb's Carload o' Comics* came first, in 1976; it is available for $7.75 (postage included; add a dollar for foreign orders) from Belier Press, P.O. Box C, Gracie Station, New York, N.Y. 10028. It's a handsome, well-produced book, with 160 pages of Crumb comix from a wide variety of sources, some obscure (such as *Gothic Blimp Works*). Excluded from consideration were the stories with Fritz the Cat, the stories from *Zap*, and a few others, all for good enough reasons. There is one new 14-page story.

I was startled by my reaction to this book. I was bored. Even the new story aroused nothing but acute feelings of *deja vu*. I have admired Crumb for more than 10 years, since I first saw *Zap* No. 1, but I've read very little of his stuff for the last two or three years. I expected to find it fresh and new again, when I read it in this book, but my reaction was exactly the opposite. A couple of stories pierced the veil and made me smile, but not very broadly.

What has made the difference? I suspect that over the years I was responding as much to Crumb's talent—which I still think is enormous—as I was to what he actually did. And, along the way, there were enough really good stories to offset the many that were self-indulgent or childishly gross. *Carload o' Comics* doesn't contain any of those really good stories, and it doesn't offer much hope that Crumb is going to take off in any new directions. It says, simply and clearly, that this is Crumb, and this is what he wants to do. Fine. But I feel about this book as I would feel about a volume of stories illustrated by, say, Wallace Wood or Barry Smith or any one of a number of artists. Gifted people, but what they do with their gifts doesn't always add up to very much. *Carload o' Comics*, I'm afraid, adds up to very little.

The same is not true, I am happy to say, of *The Complete Fritz the Cat* (which is not really complete, but is a lot closer to it than Ballantine's *Fritz the Cat* of 1969). There is a lot of previously unpublished material in the book, most of it fragmentary, but all of it interesting (especially one very early story). It is the previously published stories that are the meat of the book, and most of them hold up very well. I persist in the unpopular view that it was in the Fritz stories, and a few others in the same vein, that Crumb's gifts as a satirist, and a teller of tales in comic-strip form, were shown to best advantage. His later work, as collected in *Carload o'Comics*, is "freer" because it draws openly on Crumb's fantasies; it is duller, because Crumb's fantasies are just as foolish and repetitive as everybody else's, and even his great abilities as artist and story-teller cannot conceal that fact.

The Complete Fritz contains 115 pages of Crumb, plus a one-page introduction in which Crumb explains how the character Fritz came to be. The book is available from Belier Press (address above), for $6.80, postage included. *M.B.*

From The Complete Fritz the Cat.

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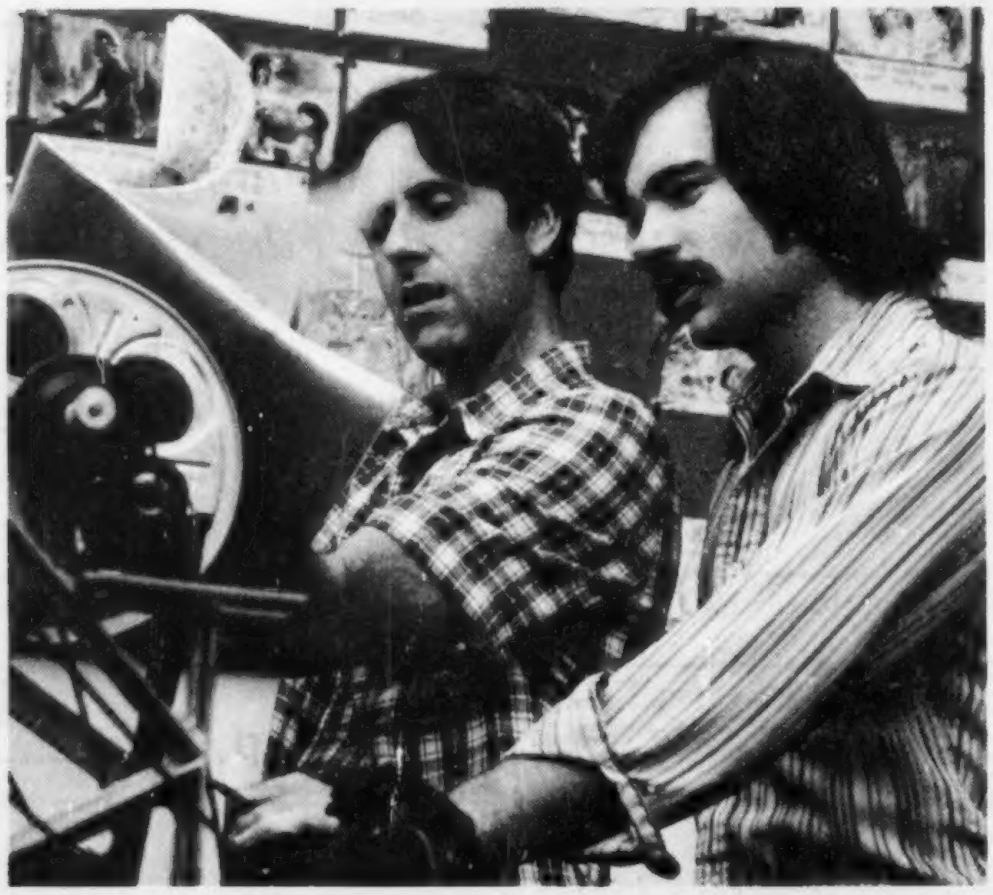

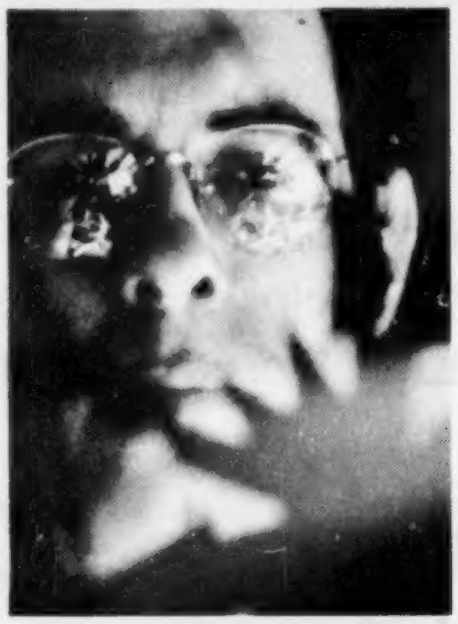

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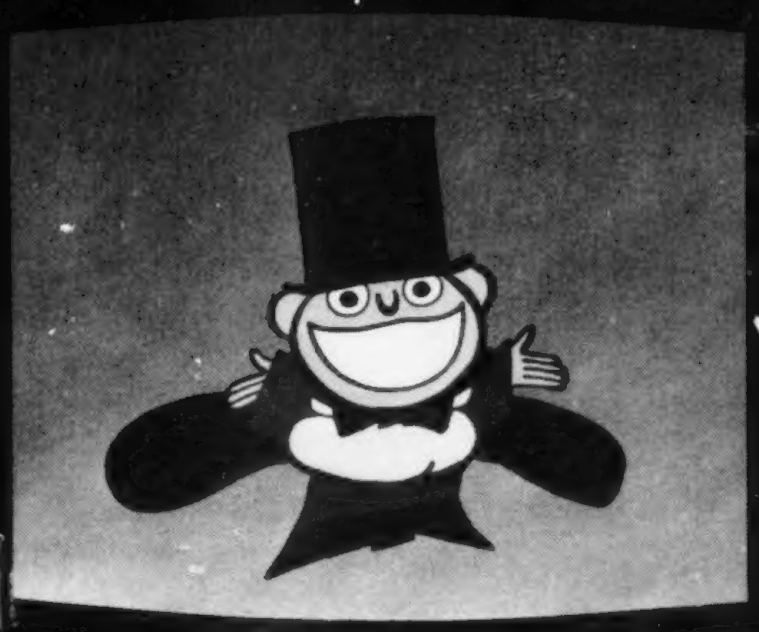

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